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THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

THE ROMANTIC READING PROCESS: TOWARDS A NEW DEFINITION

BY

JANICE M. ALLAN

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE

OF MASTER OF ARTS

DEPARTMENT OF COMPARATIVE LITERATURE

EDMONTON, ALBERTA

(SPRING 1990)

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(supervisor)

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Date: April 21, 1989

ABSTRACT

In the past, only a limited number of critics have deemed the romance novel worthy of critical attention. This thesis represents an attempt to counteract and compensate for such treatment, first, by choosing the modern romance as the subject of my study, and secondly, by adopting an attitude of acceptance and tolerance. The first chapter is devoted to an evaluation of the critique levied against popular literature. The second chapter attempts to provide a definition of the modern romance, using the Harlequin Romance as its model. In addition, it examines the nature of the reading process of the romance novel, demonstrating how it differs from that of mainstream literature. It suggests that the romance's process of naturalization is so highly internalized that romance readers will actually misread a text, interpreting it in terms of certain romance conventions. In order to demonstrate this fact, Chapters Three and Four provide a detailed examination of the novels of Catherine Cookson and Sergeanne Golon, proving, first, that they are widely read and perceived as romance novels, and secondly, that, in actuality, they possess none of the characteristics of the traditional romance novel. Finally, the conclusion is devoted to a pragmatic exploration of the proposed theory and, to this end, attempts to re-evaluate the comparable material found in Janice Radway's Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature (1984).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my appreciation to my two readers, University Professor M. Dimic and Professor R. Solomon for their interest in my subject and for their editorial comments. In addition, I am most grateful to Canada Fellow George Lang, my supervisor, for the many hours he invested in this project and, more importantly, for his astonishing patience, support and encouragement.

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Introduction

> It is obvious that the values of women differ very often from the values which have been made by the other sex; naturally, this is so. Yet, it is the masculine values that prevail. Speaking crudely, football and sport are 'important'; the worship of fashion, the buying of clothes 'trivial'. And these values are inevitably transferred from life to fiction. This is an important book, the critic assumes, because it deals with war. This is an insignificant book because it deals with the feelings of women in a drawing-room.[1]

So said Virgina Woolf in her eloquent defence of women's literature, A Room of One's Own. While this situation has improved dramatically within the realm of high literature, a critical double standard continues to characterize paraliterary criticism. Recent years have witnessed an unparalleled burst of activity in paraliterary studies, yet most of the attention has been centered upon the male-oriented genres, such as science fiction or the detective novel. Although the romance novel provides millions of readers with uncounted hours of escapist entertainment, few critics have deemed them worthy of critical attention. More often than not, they are dismissed as "trash", or dealt with superficially, by hostile or mocking critics. This project represents an attempt to counteract and compensate for such treatment, by choosing the modern romance as the subject of

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[1] Virgina Woolf, A Room of One's Own (London: Grafton Books, 1977), p. 70.

my study and, more importantly, by adopting an attitude of acceptance and tolerance. My thesis is based upon two premises: first, that the modern romance novel is, indeed, literature; and secondly, that it cannot be adequately evaluated according to the same criteria as high literature. I have tried, above all else, to recognize the inherent differences which exist between popular fiction and high literature. Any attempt to study paraliterature is seriously impaired by the lack of an applicable body of critical theory. It is not enough simply to transfer already existing theory to the realm of popular fiction, we must aim at creating a poetics which both reflects and reveals the narrative techniques unique to paraliterature. To arrive at a more precise definition of the modern romance novel and to reach a better understanding of the reading process engaged in by the romance reader, these are the goals which govern this project and represent the first, tentative steps towards a better understanding of this paraliterary genre.

Speaking of science fiction, Umberto Eco claims, "We are often tempted to lump different kinds of books together as Science Fiction, provided they deal with future, utopian worlds: in short, with some Outer Space."[2] I feel that a similar phenomenon occurs within the romance genre. Too

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[2] Umberto Eco, "Science Fiction and the Art of Conjecture," Times Literary Supplement, 2 Nov. 1984, pp.1257-1258.

often, the term "romance" is used as an all-encompassing blanket, designating *any* female-oriented popular genre, including: "glitz" novels, love stories, pornography, social historicals, psychological studies, etc., as well as the true romance. I believe that each of these different types of text possesses unique qualities which differentiate it from any other. For example, the "glitz" novel documents the coming to power of a female protagonist within the business world. Furthermore, her success is often achieved only at the expense of romance and personal relationships. In contrast, the true romance novel insists upon its heroine sacrificing career and personal objectives for marriage. How then, is it possible to group both of these novels under a single genre classification? In the past, a tendency towards critical neglect resulted in over-simplification, in future studies, we must aim at a more precise means of popular genre classification. In the words of Darko Suvin, "No field of studies and rational inquiry can be investigated unless and until it is at least roughly delimited."[3] I would assert that the romance novel represents a very specific, highly specialized literary genre. In this thesis, I have attempted to formulate a new definition of the modern romance, based upon the Harlequin example. I do not mean to suggest that the Harlequin novels

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[3] Darko Suvin, Metamorphoses of Science Fiction: On the Poetics and History of a Literary Genre (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), p. 16.

represent the only true romances, only that they are the example best suited to the purposes of this endeavor. The definition insists upon a high level of standardization in matters of character and formula and the primacy of romance above any other textual element. Moreover, it discusses the reader-character relationship and the particular escape experience which the romance novel constitutes.

Thus, we approach the second aspect of this investigation, the reading process engaged in by the romance reader. I intend to demonstrate that this process differs from that of main stream literature and indeed, to a certain extent, even from that of other paraliterary genres. This difference is most aptly captured in the opposition of directed versus tentative reading. The mainstream reader reads tentatively in search of meaning, interpreting and re-evaluating textual events according to an ever changing hypothesis. In contrast, the nature of the romance novel, as I have defined it, does not allow for such a multi-directional reading. The romance reader's knowledge of the romance formula and conventions directs her reading, functioning as blinders which allow for only one possible interpretation of a text. Furthermore, I would assert that the romance's process of naturalization is so highly internalized that a reader will actually misread a text, forcing it to conform to her expectations. In order to demonstrate this fact, I intend to examine the novels of Catherine Cookson and Sergeanne Golon, proving, first, that

they are widely read and perceived as romance novels, and secondly, that, in actuality, they possess none of the characteristics of the traditional romance novel. My purpose is not to provide an exhaustive analysis of these texts, but to view them as two typical examples of misread texts, thereby establishing that such a phenomenon exists.

The modern romance generates a wealth of questions and possible areas for exploration. Despite its undeniable popularity, scant attention has been paid to this paraliterary genre. The time has come to end the long years of neglect and criticism and award this type of literature the attention it deserves. The following is an attempt to do so.

A Defence of Popular Literature

The recent flurry of scholarly activity centering on popular culture has led many to believe that it is a modern phenomenon. In fact, when conceived in terms of ritual versus secular activity, popular culture has existed, in some form, for as long as civilization itself. It was in the fourth century B.C. that Aristotle, in Poetics, distinguished between tragedy and comedy thus establishing the division between high and low literature that persists today. Why then, after centuries of co-existence has such a strong and mutual antagonism developed between these two spheres? This question constitutes the subject of this chapter; to consider the origins of the continuing debate and to review the most enduring and commonly raised arguments levied against popular literature by the advocates of high culture. It is not my purpose to elevate popular literature to a status it does not deserve. I hope only to examine the validity of an argument that is often unsubstantiated and, by emphasizing the similarities which exist between high literature and popular literature, to minimize the gulf which appears to separate the two irrevocably.

A brief look at the history of literature in the Western world reveals the situation which originally provoked a negative reaction against popular culture. In pre-industrial Europe, authors who did not possess the means to support themselves independently relied on wealthy

patrons: the court, nobility, the priesthood, and a few wealthy merchants. Only a very small percentage of the population possessed both the financial means to commission literary works and the leisure and education necessary to enjoy them. Thus, literary creation was unequivocally associated with the luxury and prestige of the highest classes. A measure of this status was conferred upon the artists themselves, who were considered to occupy a station far superior to that of the working classes. As far as the literature itself, it needed to be of relatively high aesthetic standards to meet the taste of its well-educated patrons. Literature, for the masses, existed in various oral forms, songs, legends and folk tales. Thus, for a time, high literature felt secure of its supremacy in the courts and in the city.

Yet, the dawn of the industrial era changed this situation dramatically. Most importantly, the class structure which had characterized European society for centuries was shaken up and redefined. Industrialization caused an enormous spurt in urbanization and the city became home to the masses. According to Ian Watt:

> There was a marked rise in the numbers and wealth of shopkeepers, tradesmen and administrative and clerical employees throughout the eighteenth century. Their increasing affluence probably brought them within the orbit of middle-class culture, previously the reserve of a smaller number of well-to-do merchants, shopkeepers and

important tradesmen.[1]

In Britain, by the middle of the eighteenth century, a potential new audience was born in the middle-class. In particular, it was the women who represented the largest increase in new readers. A trend towards manufactured rather than home-produced goods, coupled with an increase of expendable income and leisure time, allowed women the both the means and opportunity to read. This rise in the reading public was aided by several factors: the spread of elementary education under the influence of Protestantism in the eighteenth century; the growing number of circulating libraries after 1740; the advent of the printing press which allowed for greater speed and volume in production; the ensuing distribution of cheaper editions; and finally, a general thirst for knowledge and the prestige associated with the ability to read.

In the past, literature functioned as an educational tool which interpreted the world for its eager readers. The change in readership affected the role of the artist dramatically. The taste of the mass reader was increasingly secular and, as is the case today, he read, among other reasons, for pleasure. This is reflected in the popularity of two eighteenth century literary forms: "the newspaper and the novel--both obviously encourage a rapid,

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1 Ian Watt, The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957), p. 41.

inattentive, almost unconscious kind of reading habit."[2] As Ian Watt suggests, "the new literary balance of power, then, probably tended to favour ease of entertainment at the expense of obedience to traditional critical standards."[3] Thus, popular literature, in the sense that we know it today, was born and the role of the artist became divided. "The role of the (high) artist came to be conceived in rather different terms; the role of general educator was dropped for that of preserver of high culture...(which) naturally linked itself to various types of elitist view."[4] The role of the popular artist, conversely, was that of entertainer.

Patronage was largely put to an end by the Copyright Act of 1709 and artists were now forced to compete with the growing number of new authors who were more than willing to cater to the taste of the masses. In these new circumstances, one of the few luxuries which the creators of high culture could afford was a sense of prestige, which they cultivated by criticizing both the masses and its associated culture. Writers who found themselves without a large audience denounced the need for one. Thus, it appears that much of the earlier critique of popular literature was an expression either of class superiority or even of

2 Ibid., p. 49.

3 Ibid., p. 49.

4 John Hall, The Sociology of Literature (London: Longman Press, 1979), p. 61.

resentment and jealousy, and an attempt to maintain the status and supremacy which had been irrevocably challenged by the rise of popular literature.

Above and beyond the pervading attitude of disdain which some intellectuals adopt towards any form of popular culture, today's critique of popular literature assumes four basic forms:

1) An attack on the financial orientation of popular literature.
2) An attack on its "parasitic" relationship to high literature.
3) An attack on the negative impact popular literature has on its readers.
4) An attack on the negative impact popular literature has on society as a whole.5

What is important to remember, while considering the validity of these arguments, is that limited empirical research has been applied to popular literature. Therefore, many of the accusations are no more than mere speculation. Furthermore, the position of the high culture advocates is based on a value judgment which is impossible to substantiate.

The first charge, that concerning the financial considerations involved in popular literature, may be further broken down into two arguments. The first results from a general attitude of elitism regarding the literary institution, while the second, and more sophisticated, deals

5 I am indebted to Herbert Gans and Popular Culture and High Culture: An Analysis and Evaluation of Taste (1974) for this four part organization of the critique against popular culture.

with the content of this literature itself.

Many proponents of high culture believe that popular literature is inferior simply because it generates enormous profits. In the words of Alexis de Tocqueville: "Democratic literature is always with a tribe of writers who look at letters as a mere trade; and for some few great authors who adorn it, you may reckon thousands of idea-mongers."[6] To this day, the illusion that "real" art may only be created under the most difficult of circumstances, by an artist willing to sacrifice his life for his art, remains strong. This attitude stems from the traditional ideal of literature as a sacred institution rather than a commodity. While, in theory, this is an ideal worthy of upholding, it is no longer feasible in practical terms. In the ever more competitive world of publishing, houses cannot afford the luxury of prestige over profit. As a result, more and more publishing houses are catering to the taste of the general populace. In a society which places so much emphasis on industry and economic growth, this argument appears to be little more than an expression of resentment against the success which popular literature has achieved. More importantly, it choses to ignore the fact that high literature, whose content and form appeal to a more limited audience, is often dependent on the profits generated by

[6] Alexis de Tocqueville, "In What Spirit the Americans Cultivate the Arts," in Mass Culture: The Popular Arts in America, ed. Bernard Rosenberg and David Manning White (Illinois: The Free Press, 1957), p. 34.

popular literature for publication. The observation which Cecil Hemley offered in 1954 is even more relevant today:

> If the printer and the binder are to live well, than it becomes economically unfeasible to do the novel that will sell only twenty-five hundred copies and the book of verse which will, perhaps, if the reviews are very good, sell three or four hundred.[7]

Furthermore, it would be erroneous to believe that historically, high literature remained untainted by monetary considerations. The concept of literary patronage, which persisted for centuries, is clearly based on the economic relationship of consumer and producer. Those unfortunate enough to be without patronage were often forced to sacrifice artistic to economic considerations. As John Hall points out, "novelists as diverse as Ainsworth and Trollope...felt themselves driven to unnatural wordiness" in order to command the higher price charged for "three-decker" novels. Or again, one might remember that Hardy was forced to give his masterpiece Far From the Madding Crowd (1874) "an uncharacteristically 'happy ending' to accede to the demands of (his publisher) Leslie Stephen."[8] Indeed, the simple fact that one could earn a living as a "publisher's

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[7] Cecil Hemley, "The Problem with Paperbacks," in Mass Culture: The Popular Arts in America, ed. Bernard Rosenberg and David Manning White (Illinois: The Free Press, 1957), p. 142.

[8] John Hall, The Sociology of Literature (London: Longman Press, 1979), p. 103.

reader" begins to suggest just how much influence and control publishers could exert over their authors.

The second aspect of this argument concerns the content which profit-oriented authors create. Critics charge that in an effort to appeal to as wide an audience as possible, creators of popular literature aim at producing a standardized, unoriginal work whereas the creators of high literature place individual expression and creativity above all else.

> The decline of the individual in the mechanized working processes of modern civilization brings about the emergence of mass culture, which replaces folk or 'high' art. A product of popular culture has none of the features of genuine art, but in all its media popular culture proves to have its own genuine characteristics: standardization, stereotypy, conservatism, mendacity, manipulated consumer goods.[9]

While it is true that popular literature is more user-oriented and high literature more creator-oriented, it appears to me that neither position can exist as an absolute, nor offers a satisfactory or satisfying situation. The author who writes solely for his audience, regardless of his personal values and ideas, would gain very little satisfaction from his task while the other, who creates solely for himself with no respect for his audience's needs

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[9] Leo Lowenthal, "Historical Perspectives of Popular Culture," in Mass Culture: The Popular Arts in America, ed. Bernard Rosenberg and David Manning White (Illinios: The Free Press, 1957), p. 55.

or wants would rarely make it to publication. Literature is usually created when a compromise is achieved, that is, when the creator communicates with his audience.

Another widespread objection raised against popular literature is that it maintains a parasitic relationship to high literature. This argument is most succinctly put by Dwight MacDonald in the following statement: "Mass Culture began as, and to some extent still is, a parasitic, a cancerous growth on High Culture."[10] The voracious appetite of the popular reading public demands a constant search for new material. In response, the creators of popular literature occasionally turn to the established classics of high literature. Unfortunately, it is often necessary to condense or simplify these works in order to attract the common reader. Creators and supporters of high literature feel that this debases and spoils their work. In a most exaggerated version of this argument, one critic claims:

> Their works are cut, condensed, simplified, and rewritten until all possibilities of unfamiliar or aesthetic experience are strained out and plot and action become meaningless thrills with an obligato of maudlin simperings and grandiose defiances; music is reduced to clatter and tinkle or cloying sentimentalities.[11]

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[10] Dwight MacDonald, "A Theory of Mass Culture," in Mass Culture: The Popular Arts in America, ed. Bernard Rosenberg and David Manning White (Illinios: The Free Press, 1957), p. 59.

[11] Ernest van den Haag, "Of Happiness and of Despair we

In defense, is it not possible that these objections are in part another attempt, on the part of high culture, to maintain a high level of prestige and status? The positive aspect of this type of transfer is that is acquaints the common reader with a number of works which, in their original form, would most likely remain inaccessible to him. Furthermore, when fashion demands, high culture does not hesitate to appropriate elements of myth and folk culture, or even to manipulate elements of popular fiction genres, such as the detective novel, into modernist and post-modernist works. The recent vogue of such primitive art as African masks, Mexican icons, and Gothic crucifixions is a clear example of this.

A secondary and related argument is that the financial success which certain popular writers enjoy lures both established and potential creators of high literature, thus depleting its talent bank. For example, Clement Greenberg writes:

> Kitsch's enormous profits are a source of temptation to the avant-garde itself, and its members have not always resisted this temptation. Ambitious writers and artists will modify their work under the pressure of kitsch, if they do not succumb to it entirely...The net result is always to the detriment of true culture.[12]

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have no Measure," in Mass Culture: The Popular Arts in America, ed. Bernard Rosenberg and David Manning White (Illinios: The Free Press, 1957), p. 525.

[12] Clement Greenberg, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," in Mass Culture: The Popular Arts in America, ed. Bernard Rosenberg

While this is an undeniable fact, it hardly constitutes legitimate grounds for criticism; competition is a natural component of any industry. Imagine the response this argument would evoke if applied to any other trade. Instead of exerting such energy on this argument, it would be more profitable to investigate means to improve the financial situation within the sphere of high literature itself. More importantly, the possibility of success is never guaranteed. Just as it requires a special talent to create a classic, not every writer is capable of achieving the delicate balance between formula and originality which characterizes popular literature. The non sequitur on which this argument is based is recognized by David Manning White who argues:

> Such reasoning implies that if it weren't for these new devils, the media, the level of our artistic life would be high indeed. Our artists would not be tempted into debasing themselves in the fleshpots of Hollywood, Radio City, or the lesser talent mills. Or without the gleam of gold blinding him, every writer who dissipates his genius writing banal slop for the soap operas and slick magazines could fulfil his destiny of becoming another Dostoevski.[13]

A subject which has stirred much interest in both the fields of sociology and mass communications is the possible

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and David Manning White (Illinios: The Free Press, 1957), p. 103.

[13] David Manning White, "Mass Culture in America: Another Point of View," in Mass Culture: The Popular Arts in America, ed. Bernard Rosenberg and David Manning White (Illinios: The Free Press, 1957), p. 13.

effect of popular culture on its audience. The critics of popular literature have used this to their advantage, claiming that popular literature is both emotionally and intellectually destructive as it seldom represents a challenge to our minds or to our perception of the world. This argument is most strongly stated by Ernest van den Haag:

> All mass media in the end alienate people from personal experience and, though appearing to offset it, intensify their moral isolation from each other, from reality and from themselves. One may turn to mass media when lonely or bored. But, mass media, once they become a habit, impair the capacity for meaningful experience. Though more diffuse and not as gripping, the habit feeds on itself, establishing a vicious circle as addictions do.[14]

In order to fully understand this issue, we must consider the reasons why readers choose this type of literature. Interestingly enough, these reasons have altered only very slightly since the rapid growth of popular literature which occurred in the eighteenth century. People read popular fiction as entertainment, to temporarily escape from reality and its associated hardships and monotony. It is exactly the purpose of popular literature to provide "spurious" or vicarious gratification.

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[14] Ernest van den Haag, "Of Happiness and Despair we have no Measure," in Mass Culture: The Popular Arts in America, ed. Bernard Rosenberg and David Manning White (Illinios: The Free Press, 1957), p. 529.

The critics' argument makes the quantum leap from this fact, that popular literature is unrealistic and escapist, to the idea that prolonged contact with it will leave the audience narcotized and unable to cope with reality. In fact, it is difficult to demonstrate that this simple cause and effect relationship actually exists. Popular literature, like most aspects of popular culture, may enforce already existing behavioral and moral codes but will not create new ones. While popular literature, like any social institution, may have a negative effect on certain individuals, it would be doing the practice of psychiatry a great disfavour to suggest that the cause of this type of psychosis may simply be traced to these individual's reading habits.

The last of these arguments concerns the effect which popular literature exerts on society as a whole. Not only, according to the critics, does popular literature lower the average level of culture in any given society, it also leads to totalitarianism by creating a passive audience who is defenseless against any potential dictator who uses it as a means of persuasion. In the words of Bernard Rosenberg, "At its worst, mass culture threatens not merely to cretinize our taste but to brutalize our senses while paving the way to totalitarianism."[15] Rather than a decline, however,

[15] Bernard Rosenberg, "Mass Culture in America," in Mass Culture: The Popular Arts in America, ed. Bernard Rosenberg and David Manning White (Illinios: The Free Press, 1957), p. 9.

recent years have seen a marked increase in cultural activity. The national level of literacy is much higher than at any point in the past and university enrollment has been, in general, increasing. This in turn, is actually producing a larger audience for high literature, which is meeting the increasing demand with a larger output than ever before. Furthermore, it would be unrealistic to assume that the presence of popular literature is the only impediment to universal participation in high culture. At no time in history was there ever a country in which the greatest works of art were accepted by all segments of the population. Although it is the classics of each age, those handed down through the canons of literature, which are best known today, the vast majority of these were virtually ignored by the general populace at the time of publication. Historically, as is the case today, high literature appeals only to a selected few.

As for the second aspect of this argument, more than being historically untrue, it approaches the implausibility characteristic of the worst popular fiction storylines. A totalitarian state, such as Nazi Germany, is always the product of a vast number of complex and interacting forces. While it is possible to manipulate popular literature in order to further the cause of an already powerful regime, paraliterature does not possess the influence necessary to make a significant contribution to the establishment of such an administration. In general, it is dangerous to associate

a society's state of government with its level of cultural awareness.

In conclusion, it appears that the critique of popular literature cannot withstand the rigours of a critical evaluation. In general, the arguments are illogical, baseless or could just as easily be applied to high literature. The critique merely reflects the personal taste and attitudes of a certain group of people. While I defend their right to maintain and voice their opinions, I cannot condone their will to impose and enforce it upon others. In our Western society, which purports to value freedom above all else, this desire is inexplicably accepted and encouraged by a great number of people.

It is significant that I have made no attempt to develop an equivalent critique of high literature, regardless of the difficulties which would be involved in doing so. My goal is not to compound the issue, but rather, to minimize the distance which separates popular literature from high literature and to encourage a mutual sense of tolerance, curiosity and respect.

New Definitions: The Romance Novel and the Romantic Reading Process

The Romance Novel

In accordance with the underlying principle of this project, a recognition of the need for a fresh rather than borrowed approach to popular literature, I feel that it is necessary to offer a new definition of the romance genre, based upon the modern example. While historically dependent upon its predecessors, dating back to the 1740 publication of Pamela, the modern romance has evolved into a self-sufficient and unique literary genre. My definition is based upon the novels published by Harlequin Enterprises and, more specifically, the series entitled Harlequin Presents. The 1987 Editorial Guidelines, published by Harlequin Enterprises, describe this series in the following terms:

> It is stating the obvious to say that the books should deal with the love between a man and a woman, a love that is resolved happily in the end; but the emphasis is on the shattering power of that love to change lives, to develop character, to transform perception. It should be treated as a once-in-a-life happening, and its repercussions should be clear throughout the book...The story should convey the acute sensitivity of emotion that accompanies falling in love.[1]

Texts in this best-selling series average at 188 pages and a certain amount of "motivated" sex is permissible. There is

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[1] 1987 Editorial Guidelines published by Harlequin Enterprises.

no need to specify either individual titles or authors as every novel within a series conforms to certain editorial guidelines which ensure a high level of standardization.

My definition considers a certain type of character, formula, setting, audience and a strong reader-character relationship as the essential, and, therefore, definitive elements of the modern romance. Although the Harlequin Romance is considered by many to be the quintessential example of this genre, my choice was influenced by more practical considerations. While the elements enumerated above are universally present in popular romances, nowhere are they more clearly defined and illustrated as in the Harlequin Romance.

The Harlequin circle of characters is limited, containing only the hero, the heroine, a female rival and occasionally, a male rival and a confidante. In general, the characters are constructed superficially, devoid of personalized character traits and lacking "roundness." As one critic points out, the Harlequin heroines "are all Everywoman."[2] This, however, does not imply that characterization is arbitrary or random. In that delicate balance of formula and originality which characterizes popular literature, the skeleton of each character is a predetermined literary construct defined by the editorial

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[2] Ann Barr Snitow, "Mass Market Romance: Pornography for Women is Different," Radical History Review 20 (1979), 145.

guidelines established and distributed by Harlequin Enterprises. The responsibility then falls upon the author to bring this construct to life, to add the flesh and blood in the form of a limited number of individualized variables, such as hair colour, origins, etc. I have constructed the following chart to outline each of the Harlequin character types, the stable boundaries within which all variables must fall. It is important to study each of these "characters," not only in isolation, but also as a component in the system comprised by the group as a whole.

	Heroine	Hero	Rival (F)	Rival (M)
Age	18-31 but usually 22-24	26-41 but usually 30-35	25-30 (Always older than heroine)	27-40 (Always younger than hero)
Physical Appearance	Attractive in a traditional way	Extremely handsome, often foreign or exotic	Strikingly beautiful	Pleasant looking
Occupation	Unemployed or traditional woman's position (i.e. secretary)	Position of power and influence (i.e. owns a company)	Glamourous job (i.e. model)	Secure Employment (i.e. social worker)
Maturity Level	Naive (this extends beyond the sexual realm)	Experienced and worldly	More experienced than heroine but generally jealous and unfriendly	Less experienced than hero but appears to be comforting and supportive
Social Standing	Financially insecure, depends on hero	Always powerful and wealthy	Higher standing than heroine	Lower standing than heroine but higher than heroine

As the chart renders obvious, Harlequin characters are established in terms of polar oppositions, the most extreme case being that of the hero and heroine and to a lesser degree, the heroine and the female rival and the hero and the male rival. Both the hero and the heroine are constructed as such extremes that, as individuals, they are lopsided and incomplete. Only as a couple do they represent a well-balanced whole. The rival may be seen as the intermediate player between the two poles of hero and heroine. The female rival is defined by the very characteristics (beauty and confidence) which the heroine feels both to lack herself and to be those most craved by the hero. The male rival represents the safe alternative, lacking the tendency to aggression and violence which the heroine fears in the hero. Thus, while each character is constructed as a separate entity, he must always be considered within the context of the group.

The following is a typical description of the Harlequin heroine,

> (Toby) was pretty, but to herself, she looked dishearteningly ordinary. Dark brown eyes under feathery, slightly arched brows--the delicate aquiline nose that emphasized her Neapolitan heritage--checks slightly too round, chin slightly too pointed, mouth slightly too small.[3]

The key word in reference to the appearance of the romance

[3] Bethany Campbell, Heartland (Toronto: Harlequin Books, 1987), p. 23.

heroine is ordinary. As a sense of identification between reader and character is essential to the success of Harlequin, and indeed all romances, the heroine must be seen as someone very much like the reader herself, someone to whom she is able to relate. Yet, it becomes quickly apparent that the life and fate of the heroine are anything but ordinary: all elements of everyday life, from late unemployment cheques to chipped nails, are rigorously excluded. One is left to wonder how this affects the relationship of the reader and character. It appears that this type of writing represents a perfect example of the Harlequin tendency to elevate the ordinary into a heightened and glorified experience. Unlike the story of Cinderella and her fairy godmother, the Harlequin does not transform the ordinary into the extraordinary, it only offers an improved vision of it. It is quite easy for both the reader and the heroine to accept their ordinary status when ordinariness is made to appear so charming. For example, while the heroine is most often employed in low paying, tedious service industry jobs, they are glamorized either by where they are or by how the heroine is rescued from them. This elevation of the ordinary is a valuable component of the escapist experience which constitutes so much of the Harlequins' appeal. This technique, when combined with a generally non-controversial portrayal of life, ensures a completely pleasant reading experience. Harlequin novels are rigorously secular and never allude to any form of

social, racial or political injustice.

Perhaps the most interesting, and, indeed, frightening aspect of the Harlequin method of characterization is the heroine's passive and weak nature in comparison to the hero's strength. This represents a far more serious issue than just the heroine's decision to await rather than cultivate the hero's eventual declaration of love. Until the final pages of the novel, the heroine is enveloped in a constant state of fear and confusion regarding not only the feelings of the hero, but indeed, her entire environment. In a constant struggle for self-control, the unfortunate heroine feels it necessary to deny her feelings and, more importantly, to hide them from the outside world. Love and hate, fear and desire are inextricably bound in the mind of the heroine. The words mocking, cruel and even sardonic typify the attitude and actions of the hero towards the heroine while his political, financial and social superiority both facilitate and perpetuate this gender-related imbalance. The disparate nature of the hero and heroine's relationship is clearly revealed by a comparison of the following two groups of phrases:

> Her perfidious heart leaped up at his unexpected nearness, and her senses whirled, threatening to go out of control. Stop this, she ordered herself in rising panic.[4]

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[4] Ibid., p. 104.

> As always when she looked at him, she could feel the tiny hairs prickling along her arms, the tensing of nerve and sinew. Not fear exactly, but close to it.[5]

> Again he was making her feel dizzy and disoriented. Stop feeling this way, she told herself desperately.[6]

versus

> He shook her, jaw clenched so hard, the bone jutted at each point.[7]

> "Look, do me a favour and keep quiet, O.K?" he growled without looking at her.[8]

> (He was in) a more dangerous mood than usual and his criticisms were especially barbed.[9]

Ironically, this imbalance is most obvious at moments of physical consummation, moments which ideally dissolve all inequalities. The shocking use of language in the following passage reveals the fundamental difference between men and

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5 Kay Thorpe, Time out of Mind (Toronto: Harlequin Books, 1987), p. 137.

6 Bethany Campbell, Heartland (Toronto: Harlequin Books, 1987), p. 91.

7 Kay Thorpe, Time out of Mind (Toronto: Harlequin Books, 1987), p. 25.

8 Sandra Martin, Intimate Strangers (Toronto: Harlequin Books, 1988), p. 44.

9 Bethany Campbell, Heartland (Toronto: Harlequin Books, 1987), p. 97.

women in the world of the Harlequin Romance.

> She had never felt so *hopeless* or so completely at the *mercy* of another human being...a being who could *snap* the *slender column* of her body with an *squeeze* of a *steel-clad* arm. No trace of tenderness softened the *harsh pressure* of his mouth on hers...there was only the *savagely punishing intentness of purpose* that *cut off her breath* until her *senses reeled* and her *body sagged* against the *granite hardness* of his. He released her wrists, seeming to know that they would *hang helplessly* at her sides, and his hand moved to the small of her back to *exert a pressure* that *crushed* her *soft* outlines to the *unyielding dominance* of his and left her in no doubt as to the *force* of his *masculinity*.[10] (Emphasis mine)

In this passage, there is a clear division between the language attributed to women and that attributed to men. Words and phrases such as snap, squeeze, harsh, savagely punishing, granite hardness, crushed, and unyielding dominance culminate in a male image of violence. Conversely, helpless, mercy, senses reeled, body sagged, and hang helplessly suggest a feminine image of helpless surrender. While this example is extreme in the conglomeration of words, it is not unusual. A clear division exists between the language of males and females throughout the spectrum of Harlequin titles.

Finally, as in the Aristotelian poetics of the tragedy, character in the Harlequin Romance is subordinated to

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[10] Elizabeth Graham, Mason's Ridge (Toronto: Harlequin Books, 1978), p. 63.

action. In fact, it is possible to see the Harlequin character in terms of the formulist concept of actant, that is, as a narrative unit whose existence is governed by his function within the text. In the Harlequin novel, the lovers exist only to serve as the tools of love.

Perhaps the most comprehensive and accessible illustration of the Harlequin formula, with both its stable and variable elements, is that offered in Julia Bettinotti's collaborative study of the Harlequin Romance, La Corrida De L'Amour: Le Roman Harlequin.[11]

Harlequin Formula

Motifs Stables	Motifs Variables
1. Recontre	A. Fréquentations ordinaires B. Relations employeur-employée C. Mariage de raison D. Vengeance et/ou séquestration E. Reprise des relations F. Cohabitation par nécessité G. Imposture H. Voyage, déplacement I. Incidents, accidents
2. Confrontation Polémique	A. Rivalités familiales B. Imposture, méprise, méfait C. Jalousie D. Mystère E. Conflicts de personnalité F. Mariage en difficulté
3. Seduction	A. Attirance physique B. Attirance cérébrate
4. Révélation de l'Amour	A. Rétablissement des fait B. Aveu mutuel
5. Mariage	A. Promesse de mariage

[11] Julia Bettinotti, La Corrida De L'Amour: Le Roman Harlequin (Montreal: Université du Quebec, 1986), p. 69.

B. Projet de vie commune
C. Reconciliation
D. Mariage (cérémonie)

The formula is initiated with the introduction of the heroine on the opening page and invariably closes upon the promise, never the practical fulfillment of marriage. It emphasizes the period of courtship as the most fulfilling and romantic stage in a woman's life. The mundane practicalities of marriage: bills, arguments, pregnancy, etc., are much too familiar to the reader (the majority of whom are married themselves) to gloss over or glamorize.

The three most interesting and inter-related aspects of the Harlequin formula are: the amount of text space dedicated to the "Confrontation Polémique," the seemingly insurmountable gap between this stage and the "Révélation de l'amour" and the role which romantic verisimilitude plays in the formula.

The "Confrontation Polemique" occupies the greater part of the text, more than fifty per cent. As the 1987 Editorial Guidelines state, "Strong characters in conflict or kept apart by misunderstanding are part of the appeal of (Harlequin) Presents (Series). If hero and heroine are too obviously compatible too early, the plot loses its suspense or tension."[12]

As the Harlequin formula is dictated by the desires of its public, it stands to reason that the romance reader is

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[12] 1987 Editorial Guidelines published by Harlequin Enterprises.

preoccupied with the differences between men and women. A formula which emphasizes men and women's mutual inability to comprehend and understand each other, when told from the female point of view, goes a long way to sympathize with the treatment which the reader may feel herself to be receiving every day. The formula confirms her role as victim of a man who is desirable and attractive but clearly guilty of abuse.

It is the very fact that so much emphasis is placed upon the confrontational aspect of the hero and heroine's relationship that makes his final declaration, not only of love but love at first sight, so difficult to accept. Yet, if the seduction represents an inadequate bridge between the two states, how is the reader capable of accepting the transition without question? Perhaps the best way of viewing the inevitable happy ending is as wish fulfillment. The enigmatical hero is revealed, much to the heroine's delight, as a being who craves love and commitment; whose earlier aggressive action is revealed, in retrospect, to have been actually motivated by love. Intellectually, the reader may experience difficulty accepting this unforshadowed ending but emotionally desires it and therefore does not allow herself to question too deeply. Incidentally, it is important to note that the typical romance ending always implies a loss of independence for the heroine: she loses her identity for that of the hero. For example, even the most independent of the Harlequin heroines, those who hold a full-time professional job, have

only three choices upon marriage: they may quit working altogether; they may reduce their hours of work or work on a free-lance basis; or, they may transfer from a rival company to one which is owned or managed by the hero. While several critics have recently parried with the concept of a "feminist" romance, this aspect of the ending is only one of many factors which prohibit such a combination.

Finally, there is the role which verisimilitude plays in the Harlequin formula. Within the romance framework, the standard narratological concept of verisimilitude as put forth by Gerald Genette (1968) or Jonathan Culler (1975), assumes a very different meaning. Rather than an adherence to the appearance and logic of everyday reality, verisimilitude, in the romance novel, requires strict adherence to the formula. As long as the reader is able to recognize the formula behind the events, she is willing to accept, without hesitation, the numerous incongruities and coincidences upon which it is depends: for instance, a secretary being sent to Hawaii on business, a man inviting the woman who has just destroyed his car to dinner, a plane crash leaving the hero and heroine as the sole survivors, etc. While this is an aspect of romance novels that provokes much criticism, it is interesting to note that the same phenomenon exists, with assuredly less censor, in male-oriented genres. As Julia Bettinotti points out, "le lecteur de romans policiers trouve 'naturelle' la présence d'Hercule Poirot dans l'Orient Express au moment où le crime

est accomli."[13]

The potential Harlequin author is told, regarding setting, that the story may occur "anywhere in the world, with no particular preference for the exotic."[14] The vast majority of writers, however, create a setting which, if not exotic, is at least unusual and foreign to the heroine. Indeed, the "trips to exotic places" and the opportunity to "meet new people" are an important aspect of the Harlequin "escape" which has been marketed with such success in recent years.

The Harlequin setting must fulfil two functions. First, it must complement and perpetuate the romantic mood of the story. For example, a tropical setting provides palm trees and sandy beaches while necessitating scanty clothing. A snowstorm, conversely, requires the couple to remain, often secluded, in close quarters with a roaring fire while providing a plausible motivation for bodily contact. Secondly, the setting must be rich enough to suggest a certain number of details which will act as "filler," much in the same way as the heroine's dress or the meals at which she is present. It is important to note, however, that all controversial aspects of the various settings are removed and each is portrayed in the most positive terms possible.

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13 Julia Bettinotti, La Corrida De L'Amour: Le Roman Harlequin (Montreal: Université du Quebec, 1986), p. 45.

14 1987 Editorial Guidelines published by Harlequin Enterprises.

Rarely, if ever, will a heroine in South Africa encounter any form of racism. It is far more common for the Harlequin author to describe a land of sunny beaches and smiling, childlike natives. Thus, it appears that setting, like so many aspects of the Harlequin novel, is manipulated by the demands of the formula to such a degree that it cannot be said to maintain an autonomous existence.

A far more interesting topic of study is the division of space into masculine and feminine areas. The typical Harlequin opens in the familiar surroundings of the heroine but the circumstances of the "Meeting" often signal a departure from the known into the unknown and often hostile environment of the hero. In the tradition of the classic hero, the body of action then occurs in a "strange" environment, one in which the heroine feels threatened while the hero remains confident and in control. In practical terms, the heroine's isolation from all that is familiar solicits the reader's sympathy and strengthens the bond between them.

Within this strange environment, the heroine seeks refuge in domesticated areas: her room, the kitchen and, in general, the house as opposed to outdoors. In contrast, the hero is most comfortable in his car or boat, outside as opposed to inside and, in general, in the very heart of the environment from which the heroine feels the need to flee. This division of space, associating women with the security of domesticity and men with the adventure and power of the

unknown emphasizes the polar opposition of women's passivity and men's strength in the Harlequin novel.

No definition of the modern romance would be complete without a discussion of the reader-character relationship. According to Kristen Ramsdell, "unless a book manages to connect with the reader's romantic emotions--even to a limited extent--the book will probably not be perceived as a romance."[15] More specifically, "the story must chronicle not merely the events of a courtship but what it feels like to the object of one."[16] Time and time again, reader surveys reveal this to be the key attraction of the romance genre. As a medium which specifically cultivates a strong sense of identification between reader and character, the romance novel allows women to temporarily experience, through the heroine, the adventure and passion of the story.

A close study of this issue reveals a much more complex relationship than one would first imagine. It is a generally accepted fact that a person's reactions to events, both real and literary, occur at two levels, one intellectual, the other, emotional. The existence of these two levels offers a possible explanation for different literary tastes within a single individual. While one might

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15 Kristen Ramsdell, Happily Ever After: A Guide to Reading Interests in Romance Fiction (Colorado: Libraries Unlimited, 1987), p. 4.

16 Janice Radway, Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature (North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), p. 64.

read high literature to satisfy his intellectual needs, the same individual may turn to popular literature to meet his need for entertainment or amusement. Nowhere is this difference more evident than in the case of the romance reader. Intellectually, the reader is distanced from the plight of the character by her advance knowledge of the formula, and specifically, the happy ending. Emotionally, the reader is involved with the heroine, experiencing the obstacles and ultimate triumph of love with her. Yet, it is only through the union of these two planes that the reader is able to derive pleasure. Participation in the formulaic obstacles and the heroine's ensuing agony and confusion is neither healthy nor enjoyable in and of itself. The reader *must* possess the superior knowledge of the hero's true feelings and motivations to receive gratification, anticipating the pleasure while immunized against the pain.

In order to understand fully this reader-character relationship, one must consider the means by which it is achieved. Above and beyond an audience-friendly attitude towards the construction of the text, the most important of these narratological tools are: the use of the third person, adopting the heroine as the primary focalizer and a strategic use of interior monologue.

While, at first glance, it may appear that the use of a first person "I" narrator relating her own experiences directly would create a closer bond between the reader and the character, this is not the case. The pronoun "I"

connotes an individual and unique identity, an identity which the use of the first person would confirm; the reader would be forced to steal the identity of another distinct individual. On the other hand, the use of the third person "she," coupled with the type of characterization described above, creates not a distinct identity, but rather, a cloak of characteristics which the reader may assume or cast off at will, a shell which she may temporarily exchange for her own.

Furthermore, in an attempt to minimize the distance between the narrator and the characters, most romantic novels adopt what Roland Barthes describes as personalized narration:

> Narratives, or at least some episodes can very well be written in the third person, although their real stance is nevertheless the first person.[17]

For example, the sentence, "But as the seconds of silence stretched into minutes, she felt her face growing hot with resentment,"[18] could easily be re-written in the first person without causing grammatical or syntactical disturbance. This personal attitude, closely related to internal focalization, helps to regain the immediacy of emotion which is often lost in third person narration, and

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17 Roland Barthes, "An Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narrative," New Literary History 6 (1975), 262.

18 Bethany Campbell, Heartland (Toronto: Harlequin Books, 1987), p. 43.

thus serves to draw the reader into the story.

Focalization in the Harlequin Romance is internal, and more specifically, filtered through the heroine. All events, except in the rare case where logic dictates otherwise, are presented from the perceptual and conceptual perspective of the heroine. There are several advantages to this type of focalization. Not only do readers, in general, tend to identify with the primary focalizer and assume that viewpoint as their own, thereby establishing the basis of the reader-character relationship, but the immediate personal and emotional style of narration encourages a new level of intimacy which further bonds the reader to the heroine. In addition, the formula itself necessitates the restricted style of narration associated with internal focalization. The reader's knowledge of the formula is extra-textual, a generic code. The story itself must be mediated through a narrator whose knowledge is restricted to the story world. The suffering of the heroine, which the reader so enjoys, depends upon her ignorance of the happy ending. Thus, it appears that the greater part of the reader-character relationship is based upon an unequal distribution of knowledge.

The following passage is a typical example of how interior monologue is used in the Harlequin Romance,

> She wondered what was wrong with her and thrust the sketch back where she found it. What did it matter if Jake hadn't drawn it? Why should the possibility give her such a ludicrous surge of joy? It was

> ridiculous. She began to think if she didn't have better sense, she might be falling in love with him.[19]

Such passages occur at strategic intervals to inform the reader of the heroine's developing feelings. This direct communication of emotion increases the dramatic potential of the narrative which, in turn, affects the reader. Moreover, the use of interior monologue eliminates the need for individual effort by supplying the reader with the appropriate feelings in a language both more eloquent and romantic than her own. Ironically, the passages reveal an interpretation of actions and attitudes which the reader knows to be erroneous; allowing her to participate in the insecurity of the heroine only as a whet to the final pleasure of triumph.

Thus, it appears that the romance novel is both highly structured, specific, and complex. Future definitions of this genre must include the following two points: first, that there exists a high degree of conformity and standardization in matters of both character and formula; and secondly, that the primacy of romance, above any other element, is essential. The importance of these two characteristics will be revealed in the pages which follow.

The Romantic Reading Process

Any attempt to study characterization in paraliterature is seriously impaired by the lack of a workable and

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[19] Ibid., p. 101.

applicable body of criticism. While recent years have witnessed much revolutionary work in the area of literary theory, limited attention has been awarded to the theory of character and characterization. Fortunately, it is possible to see a reversal of this trend in the work of such theorists as Seymour Chatman (1978) and Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan (1983).

In Story and Discourse, Chatman suggests that "a viable theory of character should preserve openness and treat characters as autonomous beings, not as mere plot functions."[20] For the purposes of this present endeavor, Chatman's open theory of character suggests itself as an ideal point of departure. In the tradition of James, it is possible to see character and formula as the "twin pillars" of paraliterature, mutually dependent and equally important. Chatman's theory allows the scholar of paraliterature to study character within such a context. Chatman then continues to describe character in terms of a well-established tradition, that is, as a paradigm of traits. Such a theory suggests that character is made whole or real only when a reader extrapolates and collects, within his imagination, all relevant information offered within the text. Thus, the character-building process assumes an outward motion, from text to reader, individual trait to complete character. While the paradigm theory has proven

[20] Seymour Chatman, Story and Discourse (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978), p. 119.

worth, I suggest that the same process, in certain paraliterary genres and specifically the modern romance, operates in the opposite direction.

Before we proceed, I feel it necessary to distinguish my use of the term "romance reader" in reference to the congestion of implied readers (Iser, Chatman), actual readers (Van Dijk, Jauss), ideal readers (Culler), etc. Between the two poles of real readers and theoretical constructs, I tend to place the romance reader closer to the former as she rules, rather than is ruled by, the interpretive process implied within the text. In her study of the Harlequin Novel, entitled Love's Sweet Return: The Harlequin Story, Margaret Ann Jenson distinguishes between three types of romance readers: the keen reader (a small number of "addicts"), the casual reader (the vast majority of readers fall into this category), and the critical reader (the closet readers who are ashamed to admit to reading romance literature). I suggest, however, that the romance reader is defined not only by her reading habits but, more importantly, by an extratextual knowledge of the romance formula and its conventions.

The romance reader approaches the text with a highly structured and well-defined notion of the romance characters, the hero and the heroine.[21] The reader then

[21] It is outside the scope of this project to undertake the sort of empirical study necessary to determine the origins of this knowledge. However, personal experience and casual inquiries reveal that while the vast majority of

imposes this preconceived knowledge upon the text, using it, appropriately enough, as a skeleton or genetic blueprint which determines the shape and nature of the characters delineated within. Exhaustive or detailed characterization is rendered obsolete as the reader is able to fill any gap of information with her preconceived knowledge of what each character is supposed to be. Thus, it appears that the character building process of the modern romance assumes, in opposition to mainstream literature, an inward direction, from reader to text and whole character to individual trait.

Bearing this supposition in mind, I turn now to an evaluation of such outdated and underdeveloped concepts as stock and type character and the appropriateness of their use for the study of the modern romance. Gerald Prince defines a stock character as "A conventional character traditionally associated with a given (narrative) genre or form; a type."[22] A type character is then defined as "A static character whose attributes are very few and who constitutes a paradigm case of a given quality, attitude or role."[23] Apparently interchangeable, the two most important features of the definition are that the character is genre-determined and of a static nature. Yet, does this

people raised within the Western culture have a generally accurate concept of what a Harlequin novel represents, they are unaware of the source of this knowledge. Perhaps, it is simply part of our cultural heritage.

[22] Gerald Prince, A Dictionary of Narratology (London: University of Nebraska Press, 1987), p. 90.

[23] Ibid., p. 101.

definition apply to the characters found within the modern romance? The appropriateness of the former point is indisputable, the romance heroine is indeed a being unique to the genre, but I question that of the latter. It is possible to see the romance formula as a documentation of the transformation of the female protagonist. In the course of the novel, the heroine evolves from a state of loneliness, naivete, social and financial insecurity to one of marriage, experience, confidence, happiness and social and financial security. It would be difficult to imagine a less static character than the romance heroine, and indeed, as already stated, this transformation constitutes a good part of the appeal which the romance novels possess. Therefore, it is not the characterization which lends itself to the use of such terms but, rather, the reader's preconceived notion of these characters. These notions are so strong that they function as blinders through which the reader is able to interpret textual information in a very limited way, that is, according to the romance formula. Thus, the reader will tend to maximize the similarities and minimize the differences both between different heroines and the actual heroine of the text and the heroine established in her mind. In this sense, the romance heroine never achieves the same degree of autonomy as that of a named character in mainstream literature. According to Roland Barthes, "The proper name enables the person to exist outside the semes, whose sum nonetheless constitutes its

entirely. As soon as a Name exists (even a pronoun to flow toward and fasten onto), the semes become predicates, inductors of truth, and the Name becomes a subject."[24] Long after we have forgotten the events which constitute the narratives of Madame Bovary (1857) or Anna Karenina (1878), we retain a surprisingly clear picture of tragic figures they portray. Rarely, however, will the romance reader remember a specific heroine for any length of time. In general, the reader will remember only the concept of the heroine or will construct a generic heroine by weaving together traits from several different texts. This is inadvertently confirmed by Janice Radway, in Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature, who states:

> Although the (reader) almost never remembered the names of the principle characters, they could recite in surprising detail not only what had happened to them but also how they had managed to cope with particularly troublesome situations.[25]

In other words, the readers do not remember the characters at all, but only the universal formula events.

In delineating his theory of character, Chatman states that "A general theory of character would require (the)

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[24] Roland Barthes, S/Z: An Essay, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1974), p. 191.

[25] Janice Radway, Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature (North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), p. 201.

criterion of Uniqueness...leading to distinction among selves."[26] Yet, the romance reader values conformity in characterization. Characters, in the modern romance, serve primarily as vehicles for the reader to share vicariously in the heroine's experience and transformation. A highly idiosyncratic character would only interfere with this process and therefore detract from the appeal of the text. This obvious difference in appeal only serves to emphasis the inherent differences which exist between high literature and paraliterature, and yet, are so often overlooked.

Is it not possible to take this argument farther and suggest that the entire reading process engaged by the romance reader differs from that employed in mainstream literature?[27] Rimmon-Kenan describes the reading process in the following terms:

> Reading can be seen as a continuous process of forming hypotheses, reinforcing them, developing them, modifying them, and sometimes replacing them by others or dropping them altogether. By the end of the reading process, the reader usually will have reached a 'finalized hypothesis,' an overall meaning which makes sense of the text as a whole.[28]

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26 Seymour Chatman, Story and Discourse (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978), p. 123.

27 It is important for the reader to remember that any discussion of the reading process refers only to the way critics believe readers *should* read as it is impossible to predict how any one reader will *actually* read.

28 Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics (London: Methuen, 1983), p. 123.

The reading process, as described above, is not unidirectional but, rather, involves retrospective re-evaluation of past events as well as speculation regarding the future. Furthermore, the reader assumes the role of a detective trying to solve the textually coded mystery to discover meaning. According to Rimmon-Kenan, "The text's very existence depends on maintaining the phase of the 'not yet fully known or intelligible' for as long as possible."[29] Thus, suspense, or, to adopt Barthes' terminology, the enigma is central to the continuation of the reading act. It is in these two respects (its multi-directional nature and emphasis on suspense) that the reading process of the romance novel differs from that of mainstream literature. I would suggest that this difference is most aptly expressed through the opposition of directed versus tentative reading.

The romance reader's knowledge of the romance formula and conventions allows her, and indeed, forces her to make a 'finalized hypothesis' before she has even begun to read. She knows that the hero and heroine will meet, that they will fall in love and face certain obstacles, and that they will inevitably live happily ever after. There are no surprises or deviations, only multiple re-enactments of the same story time and time again. It is significant that deviation would be unwelcome, conformity is the keystone to the success of the romance market. Yet, if suspense plays

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[29] Ibid., p. 125.

no role in involving the reader, what does? I would suggest, once again, that the romance reader reads to fulfil very specific needs, namely: love, nurturance and a reassurance of her own self-worth. She reads to escape temporarily the boredom of her own existence and vicariously experience love and romance through the heroine. The results of a recent romance reader survey confirm this. A significant portion of the sample readers named escape and the vicarious experience of courtship, love and marriage as the primary reasons for choosing and reading romance novels.[30] Although many feminist critics believe that the romance novels perpetuate the traditional inequality of the sexes, I believe that the romance readers themselves, interpret these novels in terms of a victory, the heroine always wins, however questionable that victory may be. In addition, is it not possible that compared to the many other escape experiences, such as drugs, alcohol, or madness, romance novels actually represent a harmless and inexpensive retreat? Furthermore, I would assert that the vast majority of romance readers are firmly rooted in reality, neither expecting nor desiring the fulfillment of their fantasies. Finally, according to a reader study undertaken by Peter Mann (1974), romance readers list reading as their primary leisure activity well above television or sporting

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30 Janice Radway, Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature (North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), p. 61.

activities. Unfortunately, this positive feature is rarely mentioned by the critics.

Having demonstrated that the reading process engaged in by the romance reader does indeed differ from that of mainstream literature, we must address the reasons why. The primary reason is the fact that the romance codes are both so highly specialized and so firmly ingrained within the reader's mind. In Culler's discussion of the reading process, he states that for the reader to make sense of a text, he must "bring it into relation with a type of discourse or model which is already, in some sense, natural and legible."[31] For example, for a reader to comprehend the meaning of Coleridge's Rime of the Ancient Mariner (1798), he must understand the conventions of poetry: rhyme, meter, symbolism, etc. Although Culler names this process naturalization, it is also identified as codes (Barthes), Gestalten (Iser), motivation (Formalists), or vraisemblaisation (Structuralists). By any name, it is a process which creates a correspondence between the text and some external frame of meaning. Culler distinguishes the five types of vraisemblance or naturalization as: the real; cultural vraisemblance; genre models; the conventionally natural; and parody and irony. For our purposes, the third category, genre models, is of particular importance as it is

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31 Johnathan Culler, Structuralist Poetics: Structuralism Linguistics and the Study of Literature (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975), p. 138.

clearly the category into which the romance conventions fall. Culler defines genre models in the following terms:

> A set of literary norms to which texts may be related by virtue of which they become meaningful and coherent...Actions are plausible or implausible with re pect to the norms of a group of works, and reactions which would be thoroughly intelligible in a Proustian novel would be extremely bizarre and inexplicable in Balzac.[32]

Their function, he continues, "is to make meaning possible by providing terms in which to classify the things one encounters."[33] The romance conventions, however, operate a significantly greater influence over the reader than the above statement suggests. The reader's knowledge of the romance conventions do more than just "make meaning possible," they actually determine what that meaning will be and direct her reading of the text. For example, as the earlier portion of this chapter demonstrates, for much of the text, the romance hero's behavior is erratic, cruel and menacing. Rather than accepting this behavior at face value and making certain justified decisions about it, the reader actually ignores the textual evidence and re-interprets it as a sign, however misguided, of love. Or again, when the heroine is suffering agonies of confusion, the reader gently laughs, knowing her fears to be misfounded. It appears,

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[32] Ibid., p. 145.

[33] Ibid., p. 148.

therefore, that the romance conventions actually alter and determine the meaning of textual events. Thus, the reading process engaged in by the romance reader is *directed*, by her knowledge of the romance formula and conventions, towards a single meaning, a single interpretation. Furthermore, this is a phenomenon unique to the modern romance. Even within the other paraliterary genres this does not occur with the same regularity. The goal of science-fiction, horror, and even detective novels is novelty, i.e. to conceive a new alien life form, a new threat to mankind, a new type of murderer. The reader is engaged in the familiar role of detective, often uncertain of the hero's future, of what will happen next, of what is a genuine clue and what is a red herring. His reading method is best described as *tentative*. The reading process engaged in by the romance reader is unique and the romance conventions exert a strength of influence unknown to other genres.

To advance yet one step further, I would suggest that if a reader approaches a text believing it to be a romance, she will, under the influence of her preconceived knowledge of the romance formula and conventions coupled with the desire to fulfil certain needs, actually misread it, transforming the powerless text, whatever it may be, into a romance novel. Characters who possess none of the characteristics typical of the romance characters will be seen as the hero and the heroine, and all action as romance. Events which do not conform to the romance formula will be

downplayed or even dismissed as irrelevant while others will be interpreted in terms of the familiar series of obstacles. The following reader's reaction is revealing:

> "Well, Dorothy, you were absolutely, physically exhausted, mentally exhausted because everything was down--it was depressing." And I'd get through it and it was excellently written but everyone worked in the coal mines. They were poor as church mice. They couldn't make ends meet. Somebody was raped, an illegitimate kid. By the time I got through, I said, "What am I reading this for? This is dumb." So I quit (Radway, 99).[34]

Although the reader herself admits that the text is "excellently written," she feels that it fails as a romance.[35] Certain texts are found wanting by romance readers not because of any deficiency within the text itself, but simply, because they are not romance novels and are being evaluated according to inapplicable criteria. Yet, rather than accept an alternative interpretive context, the reader insists upon receiving and reading the text as a romance. Perhaps the romance reader desires the same comforting, uncomplicated resolution of the romance novel from all literary experiences.[36]

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[34] Incidentally, it is interesting to note the striking resemblance between this unidentified text and Cookson's Katie Mulholland (1967).

[35] The concept of "failed" texts will be discussed in greater detail in the Conclusion.

[36] Further discussion of this topic would necessitate an advanced understanding of psychology coupled with empirical study. For this reason, I have limited myself to

In order to test this hypothesis, it is necessary to prove two things: first, that a given text is widely read and interpreted as a romance; and secondly, that this text, in reality, does not conform to any of the romance conventions and therefore cannot be considered to be a romance novel. Thus, the remaining chapters are devoted to the following two tasks: first, to provide evidence which suggests that the texts of both Catherine Cookson and Sergeanne Golon are widely read as romance novels; and secondly, to reveal, through an indepth analysis of the characters and plot formation of each, the discrepancies which exist between these texts and the romance novel as it is defined in this chapter. While such a task is laborious, I feel that it represents the only way of proving, beyond a doubt, that the writing of Catherine Cookson and Sergeanne Golon does not belong to the romance genre and, by extension, that romance readers actually misread texts.

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a discussion of the literary aspects of the romantic reading process.

The Novels of Catherine Cookson: A Study of a Misread Text

It is a difficult task to prove whether a particular writer is perceived as belonging to any one genre. There are only two possible approaches, to consider what others say about the writer and to consider what that writer says about him or herself. The case of Catherine Cookson is particularly interesting as these two sources are in constant conflict with each other. Although the number of bibliographies devoted to romance writers is limited, the name of Catherine Cookson appears in every available source, including the four most recent and comprehensive bibliographies: Twentieth Century Romance and Gothic Writers (James Vinson, 1982); Love Lines: A Complete Guide to Printed Pleasures (Rosemary Guiley, 1983); Words of Love: A Complete Guide to Romance Fiction (Eileen Fallon, 1984); and Happily Ever After: A Guide to Reading Interests in Romance (Kay Mussell, 1987). Her inclusion is such lists is significant in and of itself, proving that the critics consider her to fall clearly and unambiguously within the romance category. Yet, a careful examination of the critical commentary reveals an issue more complex than first perceived. The commentary of Twentieth Century Romance and Gothic Writers describes Cookson's work in the following terms:

> Cookson's novels literally span whole lifetimes, and, while the protagonist is usually feminine...Cookson has also used men as protagonists...Usually these good people try to do what is moral in a world

> gone mad to deny morality of any kind. Theirs is the goodness and charity that live in the darkness of evil; theirs is the giving when they have literally nothing to give. All desire to be clean, honest, to love and be loved and to work honorably for their wage; however, the obstacles to this dream are many and include economics, the demands of those weaker than they for whom they are responsible, their own emotions, and many violent happenings.[1]

This hardly resembles a typical romance novel. Indeed, this description actually reveals the very elements which differentiate Cookson from the romance norm: social injustices, poverty, violence, etc. Eileen Fallon's Words of Love: A Complete Guide to Romance Fiction is a unique bibliography as it solicits comments from each of the authors enumerated therein. Ironically, Cookson seizes this opportunity to denounce the romance genre as sharply as any of the critics cited in the previous chapter! The following comments are typical:

> Genre: I am a novelist, not a romantic novelist in the accepted sense. Thoughts on Writing: I see that which is termed romance as pure escapism and often very misleading in preparing the young to face life as it really is. I feel that the only romance in my books is the love between man and woman, which occurs in all levels of society. I am a realist, but I always endeavor to leave the readers with hope.[2]

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[1] James Vinson, ed., Twentieth Century Romance and Gothic Writers (Detroit: Butler and Tanner Ltd., 1982), p.

[2] Eileen Fallon, Words of Love: A Complete Guide to Romance Fiction (London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1984),

Thus, we arrive at Catherine Cookson's own perception of herself and her writing. Here, we have two unquestionable sources: her autobiographical work Catherine Cookson Country (1986) and her personal correspondence. Significantly, each contains an irrefutable denial of any association with the romance genre. Again, it is significant, in itself, that Mrs. Cookson actually perceives a need to defend herself.

> There is that word, 'romantic'. I don't like it, at least not in the sense it's tacked on to me. This didn't happen until my Mallen trilogy was made into a television series. Before that I was what the lady in St Leonards said I was, a regional writer. I can't imagine how anyone could tack the word 'romantic' on to The Fifteen Streets or Colour Blind, or on any of the others for that matter. Of course there are the Catherine Marchant's. Yet even these, in my estimation, do not fall into the category of romantic drivel.[3]

Or again, in a piece of correspondence dated July 20, 1988, she begins,

> I am very pleased to learn of your interest in my work. However, let me say straightaway, I have never considered myself what is nowadays generally meant by a romantic novelist. Many of my first books can be classed as social histories of the North-east of England. Even when I entered the nineteenth century with Katie Mulholland and The Dwelling Place, these still conveyed the conditions in this area

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p. 215.

[3] Catherine Cookson, Catherine Cookson Country: Her Pictorial Memoir (London: Corgi Books, 1987), p. 20.

> of that period. I think the term romantic was first applied to me after the publication in paperback, because this was the word that was considered would improve sales.

How then shall we assess the situation? At this point, suffice it to say that the romance scholars, including such eminent figures as Kay Mussell and James Vinson, believe Catherine Cookson to belong in the romance category, while Cookson herself, vehemently denies the label.

Perhaps the best way to illustrate how Cookson's characters differ from the romance norm is to examine them according to the Harlequin categories of age, physical appearance, social standing, etc. The character types themselves, however, do not neatly translate to fit Cookson's work. The four member cast of the romance novel has disappeared and been replaced by the Independent Woman, the Servant with Principles, the Violent Master and the Human Obstacle. Although one could continue to use the terms hero and heroine in their modern sense, that is, as the male and female protagonists of a novel, I feel it necessary to adopt a new terminology for several reasons. Firstly, the terms hero and heroine carry too many implications and connotations and thus threaten the objectivity of the reader. Secondly, the hero and heroine are limited to one particular role while the characters of Catherine Cookson are so much more. The Independent Woman is a lover, but she is also a mother, a daughter, a worker and an individual. It is this character who is the key

figure in the Cookson corpus and demands the greatest attention.

1. The Independent Woman

The age of the Independent Woman varies from seventeen (The Parson's Daughter, 1987) to the mid-fifties (The Invitation, 1970). In general, she is somewhere between twenty-eight and thirty-five, a few years beyond her prime and already considered well into the age of spinsterhood. More significant, however, than the nonconformity of the character's age is its apparent irrelevance. In her revolutionary work, The Second Sex, Simone de Beauvoir declares that "One is not born, but rather becomes a woman."[4] It is the emphasis which Cookson awards to this process, within her novels, that distinguishes her from the traditional romance writer. Regardless of their age, each member of this character group must undergo a maturing process, a growing awareness of self. The changes that occur in the Harlequin heroine are dependent upon the hero and her knowledge of his love, it is only through him that she evolves. In contrast, the Cookson woman cannot achieve happiness or true love until she has matured as an individual. For example, Maggie Gallacher is already fifty years of age when she has the following revelation:

> Looking back on her life at this moment she recognized with some surprise that for years there had been a private war raging

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4 Simone de Beauvoir, The Second Sex, (London:

> within her. Buried in her bulk, there had been another and quite separate individual who had been striving for life, a life of its own, but it had been smothered by her early environment, then by routine...and love, blind adoring, unquestioning love...and everything had become subordinate to that love, principally the struggling self.[5]

It is difficult to imagine such a passage, one which emphasizes the negative impact which love may affect on the individual, appearing within a traditional romance novel, but in Cookson such moments appear frequently. Much of the character's struggle for independence is waged internally. The Independent Woman must not only make others recognize her individuality and independence, she must change her perception of herself.

> Only recently (Agnes) had been wishing for something to happen, a kind of explosion in her mind that would cause her to take definite steps in one way or the other. She would then know where she was, she would then know who she was, yes, who she was. Was she destined for a spinster lady living in the big crumbling house and on the charity of her brothers? Or was she somebody in her own right, somebody who would say: This is me, this is what I want to do.[6]

Finally, the achievement of wisdom and individuality, the

Johnathan Cape, 1949), p. 273.

[5] Catherine Cookson, The Invitation (London: Corgi Books, 1970), p. 208. All subsequent references to this text will be indicated in parentheses within the text of the thesis.

[6] Catherine Cookson, The Moth (London: Corgi Books, 1986), p. 332. All subsequent references to this text will be indicated in parentheses within the text of the thesis.

products associated with such a process, is portrayed as a worthy goal in and of itself, apart from the love that is predicted upon it.

In terms of physical appearance, the Independent Woman conforms even less to the Harlequin standard. In contrast to the generically attractive heroine of the romance novel, the Independent Woman assumes a wide variety of appearances: ranging from a cross-eyed young girl (The Slow Awakening, 1976) or an obese middle aged woman (The Invitation, 1971) to a voluptuous child (Feathers in the Fire, 1971) and a ravishing and innocent beauty (Katie Mulholland, 1967). The majority of Independent Women, however, are described as women who have just missed the achievement of beauty but nevertheless possess a certain look which attracts attention. This contradiction is most clearly captured by one character's assessment of Jane McBain, the Independent Woman of Feathers in the Fire. Jane is "'plain some would say, an' no figure to speak of, but she's got somethin'...if she hadn't been handicapped with the child I think she might've blossomed into something fine...sometimes when I've looked at her I've thought she's just missed being bonny.'"[7] More often than not, poverty, abuse or plain loneliness, issues which incidentally rarely arise in the traditional romance, are the reasons named for the character's haggard

[7] Catherine Cookson, Feathers in the Fire (London: Corgi Books, 1971), p. 113. All subsequent references to this text will be indicated in parentheses within the text of the thesis. The title will appear as Feathers.

or drawn appearance. A reversal of circumstances is often all that is necessary to induce or reveal the hidden beauty of each. As one lover says of his, significantly, pregnant bride, "He had always thought she had just missed being beautiful, but when she had turned to him on the altar steps she seemed to have caught up with the beauty that had long evaded her" (Feathers, 250). In any case, the character is always shown to possess other qualities, such as intelligence, fortitude and passion, which more than compensate for her plainness. In those texts where the Independent Woman is created as an astounding beauty, this apparent asset always acts as a catalyst for unwanted attention and tragedy. It is significant, when compared to the romance myth, that this character will discover true love and happiness only in her later years when beauty has faded away.

In contrast to the typical romance heroine, it is difficult to classify the Independent Woman according to any particular social standing. Indeed, in the twelve titles which I read there is an even distribution between the lower and upper levels of society. Yet, the Independent Woman is never wealthy, and more often than not, the story documents her house suffering a severe financial and social decline.

More importantly, unlike the Harlequin Romances, Cookson realistically explores the consequences and implications of class standing, whether high or low. For example, Katie Mulholland (1967) documents the abominable

living conditions and injustices experienced by the coal miners in nineteenth century England as well as the socially condoned acts of rape or violence which servants suffered at the hands of their masters. Or again, Feathers in the Fire portrays an upper class characterized by prejudice, cruelty and deceit, desperately trying to maintain the shaky class boundaries. Although it well be discussed at greater length below, it is important to note that social issues constitute a real rather than contrived element of the Cookson text.

The novels of Catherine Cookson are period pieces, the vast majority of which are situated in the late eighteen hundreds. It is necessary to alter our expectations regarding women's employment opportunities accordingly. Harlequin writers have the freedom to chose from a virtually endless list of occupations, yet, more often than not, the heroine appears in a low paying, dull position traditionally occupied by women: secretary, store clerk, or nurse. In order to maintain a degree of historical accuracy, Cookson has no choice but to cast her characters as governesses, shop clerks or maids. Yet, unlike the Harlequin heroine who works for "pin money", Cookson's women are shown to be making a significant contribution to their families. For example, Katie Mulholland "remembered suddenly that tomorrow was wage-day, and that on Sunday afternoon she could take her month's wages home."[8] Or again, Sarah reflects, "She

[8] Catherine Cookson, Katie Mulholland (London: Corgi Press, 1967), p. 20. All subsequent references to this text

had her pay in her pocket, eighteen and six; it was good money and she could have been dressed up to the eyes if she had been able to keep at least the eight and six, but no, she had to tip up fourteen shillings each and every week."[9] Even those characters who claim a title must bear the responsibility of running the house.

> (Jane had) never felt so well in her life. And this in spite of carrying a child and working as hard as any hired maid. She had completely taken over the dairy; she made butter and cheese as good as Molly now; she helped to milk the cows, feed the pigs and chickens, and groom the horses. During her thirty-one years on the farm she had never spent so much time outside the house (Feathers, 255).

Thus, we have exhausted all the categories necessary to delineate the Harlequin heroine without even touching upon the more vital aspects of the Independent Woman. In contrast to the superficially developed characters necessitated by the romance formula, Cookson takes great pains to fully develop the mental and psychological dimensions of her characters. Indeed, it is a certain spiritual quality, common to all of the Independent Women which earns her name and lends cohesion to the group as a whole.

The three qualities most associated with this character

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will be indicated in parentheses within the text of the thesis. The title will appear as Katie.

[9] Catherine Cookson, The Blind Miller (London: Corgi Books, 1963), p. 26.

group are selflessness, strength of character and passion. The Independent Woman is selfless to a fault, often sacrificing her youth to care for her family, as a whole, or the helpless and neglected family member, the Human Obstacle. The relationship which Jane McBain maintains with her younger disabled brother typifies the relations between the Independent Woman and the Human Obstacle and is documented by one of the manor's servants, "'I can't see Miss Jane marryin', her whole life's taken up with the child. You'd really think it was hers. An' he won't let her out of his sight. She's mother, father, nurse, the lot to him'" (Feathers, 112). While often unhappy and suffering mental and physical abuse, this character refuses to abandon her duty by leaving. Fortunately, the occasional display of resentment and despair humanizes her and saves her from fulfilling the stereotype of the Martyr. Forced to assume the sole responsibility of her retarded sister, Agnes "seemed to accept the fact that she was entering a new kind of world, the world of spinsterhood, and she saw it as something that had to be faced, lived with, endured. But with the handle of the door gripped in her hand, she looked down at it as she thought bitterly, What a waste of life!" (The Moth, 215). Furthermore, there is nothing romantic or glamorous in this work. Unlike the Harlequin heroine who cannot help but look provocative as she dusts and sweeps, the work of the Independent Woman is described in the following realistic terms:

> Her "getting on" took the same pattern it did everyday: getting Lizzie up, changing her, washing her, then draping her in a gigantic napkin. This done, she tackled the bed. It was always wet, and she was lucky if this was all she had to cope with. After making the bed up with rough dry pieces of twill she took the dirty pieces in the wooden bucket down the two flights of stairs to the yard and there, in the communal wash-house, she washed them, without soap, in cold water and hung them on the line (Katie, 161).

The generous nature of the Independent Woman is complemented by an inner strength and independent spirit. This strength is most often displayed either in defense of the Human Obstacle or in her struggle to gain independence. For example, when Master McBain threatens to have Amos put away, Jane has the courage to stand up to her tyrannical father and declare, "'Father, if you were to do that I would leave with him. I would take up a position of some sort as near to him as possible, and not even mother's predicament would keep me here, nor the fact that I'm still under your jurisdiction. Only by force, Father, would you keep me if you sent him away'" (Feathers, 115). Or again, when her family fails to recognize her worth as a person, Agnes has the fortitude to assert herself and demand their consideration.

> "I adopt this manner toward you all, Arnold, because of the lack of consideration you have adopted towards me. Have any of you given a thought to my welfare...who (is) to see to the running of the place? Oh someone who doesn't count, it's her duty...Agnes! Anyway, if she didn't do that, what else could she

> do? As I just said, I could give piano lessons; I'm quite free. Oh! Oh!" (The Moth, 213).

While the Independent Woman is often quite lonely in her solitary existence, she, unlike the Harlequin heroine, has the ability to deal with any problem which might arise, there is no need for a man to protect her; she is quite capable of doing this for herself.

The Independent Woman is able to survive alone, but in order to experience true happiness she must find love. In this one respect, she appears to resemble the romance heroine, but the realistic description of her love and passion once again differentiates her. Furthermore, the relationship between the Independent Woman and the Servant character is significantly different from the romance norm and, more importantly, does not constitute the primary element within the text. The Independent Woman is not satisfied with mere affection or a marriage of convenience, she craves passion.

As one character complains of her fiancée:

> When (James) kissed her it was without passion. He made her feel unwomanly at times; and they were such times when she felt overwomanly, as she put it to herself, when she longed for him to kiss her and hold her in a way that was anything but seemly (The Moth, 59).

Finally, when James insults her womanhood she, in a fit of passion, recognizes him for what he is and denounces him to his mother, "'You didn't breed a man, only something that dresses like one. He's gutless'" (The Moth, 166). Initially, the heroine may try to deny her feelings of sexuality as something negative or unnatural, as Agnes does when she "bathed herself and scrubbed her body with a loofah to rid herself of the dirt (his kiss) has exposed in her" (The Moth, 59). Yet, once she has fallen in love, she no longer feels it necessary to stifle her feelings and goes so far as to challenge the accepted roles of sexuality.

> She was grateful to him for ending her years of virginity, her years of personal torment. She had never been able to see any virtue in chastity, and had questioned the right of a piece of paper which legalized a natural desire, a desire which, indulged in before the signing of the paper, earned for the female the title of wanton, or whore, while it was considered the natural procedure for a male, even making him into a dashing fellow, a real man.[10]

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[10] Catherine Cookson, The Mallen Streak (London: Corgi Books, 1973), p. 69.

If one recalls that the Harlequin heroine is engaged in a constant battle to hide and deny her feelings, the sexuality evident in the characters of Cookson renders them, above and beyond being different from the romance norm, believable and human, thereby raising them beyond mere types and shells of people.

What then does this comparison of the Cookson Independent Woman and the Harlequin heroine reveal? First, that when examined in terms of the Harlequin categories, Cookson's protagonist simply does not conform to such narrowly prescribed boundaries, she is of no particular age, social level, or occupation, but, rather, appears in all walks and stations of life. Secondly, that the questions and possibilities raised by such categories (implications of social class, employment, etc.), while ignored by the Harlequin Romances, constitute an essential element of the Cookson texts. Thirdly, and most significantly, the Independent Woman cannot be captured through examination by category: she is too complex and assumes too many shapes and forms. Characters in the romance novel are depicted in the simplistic terms of black and white, good and evil; the heroine is, by definition, good, virginal, and approaching perfection. In contrast, the Independent Woman is marred, a mixture of good and evil. For example, Katie Mulholland is jailed for prostitution; Sarah Hetherington, in The Blind Miller, for murder; and finally, Ann Brigmore of the Mallen trilogy commits murder and various other crimes to ensure

the happiness of her ward.

2. The Servant with Principles

In her seminal work, The Female Eunuch, Germaine Greer describes the romance hero in the following terms:

> The lover in romance is a man of masterful ways, clearly superior to his beloved in at least one respect, usually in several, being of older or of higher social rank and attainment or more intelligent and au fait. He is authoritative but deeply concerned for his lady whom he protects and guides in a way that is patently paternal.[11]

It is interesting that the analysis of the previous chapter reveals this portrait, written almost twenty years ago, to be a startlingly accurate assessment to this day. It is equally intriguing that the Servant with Principles, the hero figure in the Cookson text, differs, in every respect, so dramatically from the type of hero described above.

Surprisingly enough, the Servant is generally younger than his partner, the Independent Woman. Yet, he feels none of the awkwardness and insecurity associated with the reverse position as it inevitably occurs in the Harlequin Romance. In terms of physical appearance, the Servant with Principles bears a superficial resemblance to the romance hero; he is good-looking, muscular and obviously capable. The following description is typical:

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[11] Germaine Greer, The Female Eunuch (London: Paladin Grafton Books, 1970), p. 174.

> He was a man of good height, all of five feet ten, with broad shoulders, a firm short neck and a face make square by his jaw bones; his nose was on the large side and his eyes were round and brown, looking almost black now because there was anger behind them; his brows above them were high as if raised with his anger. His hair like his eyes was brown; it was thick and unusually long for a man, for at the back it came to the top of his shirt collar (The Moth, 23).

Yet, unlike the traditional hero of the romance novel, physical attributes are devalued, and it is made very clear that this character is attractive for other reasons.

> There was a man who was free, independent, no ties, no nothing. And he was attractive to women. What was it about him that made him attractive? He was pleasant looking but not all that good-looking; he was tallish but his body was bulky with it, thickset. Perhaps it was the strength he gave off that women admired (The Moth, 214).

It is this strength which defines his character. Unlike the typical romance hero, the Servant, as his name implies, is a member of the lower class. Yet, he is unmistakably proud, ambitious and strong. The following comment is typical, "there was neither respect nor subservience in young Armstrong's manner" (Feathers, 31). Or again, "'You're not the usual type of servant'...'What you mean is, I'm not subservient enough, miss,'"and finally, "It more than vexed him that the man wouldn't defer to him or to anybody else for that matter" (The Moth, 238). Absent from this strength, however, is the element of brutality or cruelty

associated with the Harlequin hero. Unlike the vast majority of Cookson's upper class characters, the Servant, and indeed, it often seems his entire class, is highly principled. He genuinely cares for those around him and is frequently called upon to defend his beliefs and values, often at the expense of his comfort and financial security.

The one quality which Cookson always associates with this character is intelligence and a desire to learn. Every last member of this character group can read and write. The attitude of Davie Armstrong is typical:

> "You wouldn't believe, Miss, what it means to a man when he can write his own name; gives him a sort of dignity. In some boats there's not much difference atween the rats in the holds and the humans below decks, because they're not tret any better than you would treat vermin; an there was many such in our boat. But you know, Miss, once those fellows could spell cat, dog, rat and fat, an write their name, why, it was like a miracle, what it did for them" (Feathers, 176).

In more general terms, Cookson obviously feels very strongly about the importance of, if not education, than at least the ability to read and write.[12] Indeed, all positive characters possess this ability. One master, George Rosier, "wondered at the incongruity of the situation where the chief member of his staff could only identify himself by two crossed lines whereas the least of his staff (Katie

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[12] Mrs. Cookson herself received very little formal education and is basically a self-taught individual.

Mulholland) could sign her name" (Katie, 22). Or again, in the same text, another mistress upbraids her daughter for suggesting classes for the miners, "'Child, do you think a miner would go down a mine if he could read and write correctly: Do you want your father's business to collapse? Do you want us to starve? Never let such a proposal come to your father's ears, it could cause him to have a seizure'" (Katie, 10).

Finally, it may be said that the single all-encompassing difference between the romance hero and Cookson's Servant with Principles is a distinct lack of glamorization. While the concept of the term hero has been devalued in modern times, the figure, as put forth in the Harlequin Romance, represents more than the male protagonist of the story. The Harlequin hero does not exist in the real world, he is a myth rather than a man. By contrast, there is nothing unusual, nothing supernatural in the Servant character.

Moreover, a charming and attractive hero is an inherently essential element of the romance novel yet, such a figure is noticeably absent from many Cookson texts such as Katie Mulholland, the Mallen trilogy, or The Invitation (1970). The male characters, in these texts, are cold men of questionable morals and motives. They constitute another in the series of obstacles faced by the Independent Woman on her journey to self-awareness and happiness, more than a simple love interest. Or, at the other extreme, there is

the case of The Man Who Cried (1979), a text with no heroine. It is both a written and universally understood rule that the center or pivot of a romance novel is the heroine; all action is understood in terms of its effect upon her. Yet, in this text, the main character with whom we identify, is a man. Furthermore, this man is certainly not a hero, he is a bigamist and liar, middle-aged and poor. The novel traces *his* life between four women who are as enigmatic to him as the Harlequin hero is to his heroine.

3. The Violent Master

The antithesis of the Servant with Principles is the Violent Master.[13] This character is reminiscent of both the menacing husband or father of the Gothic tradition and the hero of the Harlequin Romance. He is violent by definition:

> As the sound of a blow accompanied by a cry came to Agnes, she sprung into the room, there to see her mother crouched on the floor, her arms clutching the sides of the bed. Her father was bending over her, his face almost unrecognizable with the rage suffusing it. And now he swung round in surprise and, after straightening his back, he glared at her for a moment before throwing at her a string of obscenities which made her close her eyes and hunch her shoulders against them. When he was finished, the saliva was running down from the sides of his mouth, and with the pad of his thumb he wiped it across his lips before stumbling from the room (The Moth, 67).

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[13] Class struggle and conflict is a theme which permeates Cookson's work and will be discussed at greater length below.

In contrast to the traditional romance novels, this trait is not glossed over nor hidden beneath an exotic mystic. In Cookson, violence and brutality are revealed in their true light: abhorrent and frightening. There is nothing positive, sexual or exciting in violence and brutality. The character's lack of humanity often results in namelessness, identifying the Master as the other or outsider. For example, in Feathers in the Fire, "it was noticeable that neither of them referred to Amos as Master, or Master Amos, he was HE, as he had at one time been IT" (Feathers, 200).

4. The Human Obstacle

Conflict is an integral element in any well-constructed text and the presence of obstacles is not limited to the romance genre. The Human Obstacle, a character unique to Cookson, represents an obstacle, never to love, but always to happiness. He or she ties the Independent Woman to an abusive or unhappy situation. For example, Jane, the Independent Woman of Feathers in the Fire, who has recently married the man she loves and is expecting his child, cannot help but think, "If it wasn't for the thought of Amos (the Human Obstacle) constantly niggling at her mind she'd be so happy it would be unbearable" (Feathers, 255).

The character itself is either physically handicapped (Amos, Feathers in the Fire, and Lizzie, Katie Mulholland) or mentally handicapped (Millie, The Moth). While they claim the sympathy of the Independent Woman, each character is portrayed as an individual and evokes an appropriately

varied reaction from the reader. For example: Amos is a murderous tyrant, responsible for the death of his father; Lizzie is a grotesque misshapen figure, "a woman...or a girl. It all depended upon how you appraised her...she was known as Mulholland's idiot...but to Katie in particular she was a crippled bird, and evoked the same tenderness" (Katie, 29); and finally, the ethereal Millicent, "'eccentric, odd in that she knows no boundaries, as we do, as regards class or time'" (The Moth, 61). The Human Obstacle works well, a practical embodiment of what is too often left abstract. Yet, it is difficult to imagine the place of this character in the romance novel, where all obstacles are superficial and the circle of love is not large enough to admit a third character.

Comments

Thus, it is clear that both Cookson's characters and her method of characterization differ dramatically from the romance norm. Furthermore, character, in Cookson, achieves a primacy impossible within the romance genre. In practical terms, the non-formulaic nature and longer length of the books allow for greater character development. Coverage extends beyond the brief period of courtship, often tracing a character through several generations, as is the case in Katie Mulholland and the Mallen trilogy. Characters are developed by placing them within a familial and societal context, thereby shifting the emphasis away from romance towards a more complex set of relationships and enlarging

the circle of characters. Moreover, unlike the Harlequin's use of a solitary focalizer which necessitates the constant presence of the heroine, the point of view is diffused between a variety of Cookson's characters and the Independent Woman and Servant with Principle are often absent for significant portions of the text. All of this supports the supposition that the novels of Catherine Cookson tell the story of their characters, not love, not romance. Unlike the romance novel, Cookson's lovers are more important than the love they may or may not share. And this, if nothing else, proves that the novels of Catherine Cookson, while containing similar elements, do not belong to the romance genre.

Plot-Formation

The romance formula, as defined in the previous chapter, invariably consists of five elements: the meeting, a period of conflict or obstacles, the seduction, a revelation and finally, marriage. The two most important features of this definition are its invariability and the primacy of romance. It is in these very two aspects that the Cookson stories differ. In contrast to the romance norm, Cookson's novels are not formula-determined. A brief summary of three sample plots renders this obvious.

1. Katie Mulholland

A young maid, Katie Mulholland, is raped by the master of the house, Bernard Rosier. Discovering that she is pregnant, Katie leaves the house but refuses to name the

father of her child. Bernard's sister, knowing the truth, demands that reparation be made to the young girl. Rosier bribes one of his employees, Mark Bunting, to marry Katie and accept the responsibility for her child. Katie is forced to comply for fear of the power Rosier holds over her family. When Bunting's hopes for continued support are not realized, his behavior becomes abusive and culminates in an attack which leaves Katie unconscious and badly injured. In retaliation, Katie's father strikes Bunting and, when he is found dead the following day, is hanged for his murder. Katie, now responsible for her entire family as well as her own child, leads them to the countryside where she achieves a sense of peace, but both her mother and brother wish to return to the city. Finally, Katie agrees to return and is persuaded to give away her child to be raised as a woman of society.

Back in the city, their situation deteriorates, Katie's mother dies, her brother is unable to find employment and she herself must stay at home to watch Lizzie (the Human Obstacle). At her lowest moment, Katie meets Andree Frankael, a Swedish captain on temporary leave. Although he is married, the two fall in love. Meanwhile, Rosier has plotted revenge on Katie and while Andree is out to sea, has her sent to prison on a false prostitution charge. In an attempt to provide Katie with some degree of security, Andree purchases three houses in her name, and so her release from prison marks the beginning of a journey to

respectability and happiness. His wife having passed away, Andree is finally free to marry Katie. Yet, their marriage is continually marred by tragedy. Katie's child, unaware of her true origins, falls in love with Rosier's heir (her half-brother). Katie is forced to reveal her identity and suffer the rejection of her child before the couple elopes to America. In addition, she must deal with the unwelcome advances of her step son, the illegitimate child of her niece, the murder charges which come to be levied against Andree, and as always, her fear and hatred of Bernard Rosier.

In the meantime, Daniel, the grandson of Katie and Rosier, comes to know of his true ancestry, travels to England to meet his grandmother, and falls in love with her grand-niece, Bridget. Katie, approaching senility, is consumed with her hatred of the Rosier family and will not permit her niece to marry into his family. Daniel leaves and it is only many years later that the war reunites the couple. As the story closes, Katie's house is struck by a bomb, killing her and badly injuring Daniel. The reader is left to presume that he will recover to find happiness.

2. Feathers in the Fire

As the story begins, the McBain farm is called to witness the flogging of Molly, a young servant who refuses to name the father of her unborn child. Inadvertently, Davie Armstrong (the Servant with Principles) and the young mistress Jane (the future Independent Woman) discover that

the father is none other than Agnus McBain, owner of the estate. Determined that his child should have a name, McBain orders Davie to marry the girl and assume responsibility for the child. Although Davie has always cared deeply for Molly he refuses and is forced to leave. When the mistress, pregnant herself, realizes that her husband has been unfaithful, she falls into premature labour and delivers a deformed child, a son without legs. The master orders Molly to drop the child into the quarry but Davie happens along to stop her. While Molly vehemently denies the intention to carry out her task, Davie leaves believing the worst of her. Amos, abandoned by both his mother and father, is forced to live in the attic, raised alone by Jane and the servants. Years reveal the child to be exceptionally intelligent but equally resentful of his confinement and those responsible. On the very night of Davie's return, Amos, in an attempt to gain control of the farm, pushes his father down a flight of stairs and kills him. Still unable to forgive Molly for her sins of the past, Davie devotes his attentions to Jane, whose fiancé has recently suffered a suspicious and fatal accident. Although Jane is aware of her brother's involvement in both incidents, she cannot bear to send him to prison, and so he remains free to commit further violence. When Amos learns of Jane's relationship with Davie, he attempts to kill them both but manages only to set a fire which, in the end, consumes him. Finally, pregnant with Davie's child, the

couple marry only for Jane to die in childbirth. In mourning, Davie turns to Molly and allows himself to forgive her and admit what was always true, that he loved her.

3. The Invitation

The Gallacher household is thrown into upheaval by the arrival of an invitation to the Duke's ball. Maggie Gallacher, a woman who provokes more laughter than love, is delighted while her husband Rodney is terrified that his obnoxious and alcoholic wife will embarrass the family. His worst fears materialize and, horrified by the scandal, he leaves his wife and, in turn, is left by his mistress. Alone, Maggie is forced to cope with the knowledge of her husband's infidelity, her alcoholism and her guilt, as well as all the responsibility for her children: a daughter who has left the church, a son who physically and sexually abuses his wife, and another who is in love with a married woman. Considered by all to be "a blind, ignorant, great, fat slob", Maggie begins the long road to self-respect and happiness (Invitation, 131). The greater part of the narrative is devoted to this journey, showing her lose weight, educate herself, find a stimulating and enjoyable job, and come to know and appreciate her own worth. This process is foiled by the severe social and economic decline experienced by Rodney within the same period. Only when Maggie has achieved a new state of confidence and awareness is she able to welcome Rodney back into her life. And significantly, their new relationship is characterized by a

role reversal where Maggie is the partner who possesses the money, power and poise.

Comments

Thus, it appears that the Cookson plots are both diverse and intricate. These summaries capture only the main plot line of each text, but her stories are inevitably interwoven with anecdotes and subplots. There is no formula to guide the reader or allow her to foresee future events. The reader is once again engaged in a multi-directional process of tentative reading, that is, in the role of a detective using textual clues to decipher coherent meaning.

Although one might plausibly conclude on the realization that Cookson's work is not formula-determined, it is both interesting and revealing to compare how her treatment of each element of the formula differs from that of the romance novel. In the traditional romance, the heroine is introduced on the first page and the hero, assuming the shape of either a mysterious stranger or a powerful employer, shortly after. Their meeting relies on coincidence and, in addition, signals a departure from the familiar territory of the heroine into the unknown and often hostile territory of the hero. In contrast, the meeting of the Independent Woman and the Servant with Principles is a less contrived and more realistic occurrence. Cookson's story worlds are usually limited to one particular town or even an individual farm, it is only natural, therefore, that the characters should meet and become acquainted. In The

Moth, The Glass Virgin, (1970), and Feathers in the Fire, the relationship begins as that of master and servant. Incidentally, the regional nature of Cookson's work ensures that her characters are never really alone nor in a foreign environment. More importantly, a late introduction of the hero allows the author greater opportunity to develop her main interest, the Independent Woman.

According to Margaret Ann Jenson, author of Love's Sweet Return: The Harlequin Story, "in Harlequins the obstacle is only temporary or even chimeric."[14] In general, they arise as a result of misunderstanding or a lack of communication. For example, in a most extreme and, indeed, amusing case cited by Jenson, the hero suspects the heroine of being a Soviet spy interested in NATO's Early Warning System when, in reality, she is simply an overworked model on vacation.[15]

It is difficult to speak of obstacles in this same sense in reference to Cookson. The Harlequin obstacle exists and gains significance only within the formulaic construct as a whole. In contrast, the obstacles presented by Cookson are more substantial; they represent serious issues in and of themselves. Furthermore, they achieve an autonomy impossible within the romance novel. With no

[14] Margaret Ann Jenson, Love's Sweet Return: The Harlequin Story (Toronto: Women's Educational Press, 1984), p. 76.

[15] Mary Wibberley., Dark Viking (Toronto: Harlequin Enterprises, 1975).

formula to guarantee a complete resolution, each complication demands the reader's full attention. Poverty, social and religious differences, and the character's own lack of awareness are typical complications in the Cookson novel.

In order to follow this train of thought, it is necessary to consider the role of setting within Cookson's work. Particularized settings have no place in the romance novel, their sole function is to create an exotic and romantic atmosphere to complement the lovers. "Harlequin Enterprises' emphasis on providing stress-free entertainment for women readers as well as its authors' own race and class biases lead to those highly romanticized, inaccurate versions of reality."[16] Quite the contrary situation exists in Cookson. It is possible to interpret each of her works as a history of an individual in a particular place and time; the place being North-East England, Jarrow, Northumberland, and the Tyne, while the place, the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. It is the controversial nature of this setting--the mines, glassworks, and shipyards, the rampant poverty of the workers, the inordinate wealth of the owners, and the antagonism which exists between the two--which fill the pages of Cookson's novels. Poverty, and its ensuing sense

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[16] Margaret Ann Jenson, Love's Sweet Return: The Harlequin Story (Toronto: Women's Educational Press, 1984), p. 81.

of fear and insecurity, is more than an obstacle in the life of Katie Mulholland; it *is* her life and determines every choice and judgement she makes. Or again, the struggle between classes does not conveniently disappear to provide a happy ending to The Moth. The couple is indeed united but all family and social ties are irrevocably severed; the couple is forced to exist as outsiders, accepted and welcomed by neither faction. In the novels of Catherine Cookson, the obstacles and tragedies make characters, not romance; setting develops character by providing situations to which characters must react,thereby revealing his or her true nature to the reader.

Sex does not play an especially significant role in Cookson. While any discussion of sexuality and passion is both open and honest, the actual love scenes are chaste and circumspect. More importantly, it is possible to distinguish at least two fundamental differences between the sexual relations in Cookson and those of the romance novel. First, the sexual double standard continues to dominate the romance novel. The heroine is caught in the paradoxical position of wanting and preserving. In the words of Margarat Ann Jenson, "When unmarried, heroines must avoid being 'that sort of girl', but after marriage they must become 'that sort of girl' to avoid having 'that sort of marriage.'"[17] Although it may take time for Cookson's women

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[17] Ibid., p. 116.

to come to terms with their sexuality, passion is one of the Independent Woman's defining characteristics. Indeed, fertility and a healthy sexual appetite provide an accurate means of assessing character. Cookson's characters are often punished by infertility, miscarriages and the death of their children. Incidentally, this helps to explain why the lower class family is shown to be a stable and secure institution, while that of the upper class is divided and disintegrating.

Secondly, sex in the romance novel is inextricably bound to violence. Not only is the hero more sexually experienced, he is physically dominant and this is part of his appeal. While Cookson's male assumes the role of teacher to his sexually inexperienced partner, he is a non-menacing player. There is a clear distinction between an act of love and an act of violence. In the example of a Harlequin love scene, given in Chapter Two, what really amounts to rape is described as a passionate and acceptable sexual act. In comparison, it would be difficult to read the following passage and not hear the unmistakable voice of judgment:

> For a moment he held her there with only one hand, and that across her mouth. It kept her head and shoulders deep in the bed, but her limbs flayed wildly, until a weight dropped on her body and hell opened and engulfed her. The hell she had read about in the Bible, the hell Mr. Burns talked about in the chapel, the hell into which sinners were thrust for their everlasting life. Her body was being rent

> in two; she was screaming but could make no sound...After a time...he raised himself up and looked at her sprawling, part-naked limbs with distaste. Then his eyes travelled to her hand which was clutching the bedcloths...He had taken her without the slightest endearment, not even bothering to caress her limbs, which courtesy he bestowed on the meanest of his women. He had taken her with less feeling than a dog would a bitch, and he hadn't deigned to open his mouth to her from beginning to end. But the wagging finger spoke volumes and she understood his meaning (Katie, 55-56).

Further commentary is unnecessary: the difference is obvious to all. Cookson may only be praised for breaking away from the romance's tendency to perpetuate the myth which suggests that all women desire and respect violence.

The romance revelation, that is, that one magical moment in which all misunderstandings are resolved, obstacles disappear and the hero and heroine realize they are in love, has no place in the Cookson novel. As previously demonstrated, the nature of the obstacles and complications simply do not allow for such a convenient resolution. Furthermore, such a revelation is unnecessary. The purpose of this step in the romance novel is to reveal, in retrospect, the true nature of the hero as loving and kind; he only *seemed* to be cruel, he only *seemed* to be uncaring. The consistent behavior of the Cookson characters renders this step obsolete.

Finally, marriage is the only logical conclusion to the romance novel. Synonymous with love, happiness and security it represents the fulfillment of the heroine's life goal.

According to Irene Roberts:

> It is not and never has been the function for a romantic novelist to continue further than the first dawning and final declaration of true love. To take the next step would be to enter into an entirely different field. I am glad this is so. It would take the gilt off the gingerbread to ruin the idyllic dream with realities. How sad to watch the heroine, now married and pregnant, trying to do up her shoes.[18]

In contrast, it is these very realities--infidelity, a lack of trust, boredom, abuse and neglect--that Cookson develops. Marriage, in her work, represents not an ending, but rather, a beginning and, more often than not, yet another in the series of obstacles which the characters must overcome. It is significant that the actual weddings are rarely described in more detail than the following:

> For the hundredth time she now heard Andree telling her not to be afraid. 'Just remember,' he was saying, 'you are entering this house not as Katie Mulholland but as Mrs. Fraenkel.' It was as if he imagined his name, which he had given her by special license last week, had some magic power to protect her. But it hadn't, no more than Bunting's, and she had taken that by special license too (Katie, 294).

The ideal and invariably happy ending of the romance novel is replaced, in Cookson, by what might be better termed a resolution, where what was wrong has been put right and

[18] Rachael Anderson, The Purple Heart Throbs (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1974), p. 244.

disparate forces are united. Instead of evoking from the reader a sense of whimsy, it suggests a sense of peace. For example, the conclusion of Katie Mulholland witnesses the end of an era governed by hatred and fear when, through their grandchildren, a union of the Mulholland and Rosier families is finally achieved. Or again, the final chapters of Feathers in the Fire see a "fallen" woman restored to her proper place and united her with her rightful lover. Yet, there is very little exhilaration or joy in these endings.

> They had to go up the stairs in single file but he still held on to her hand, and each step took her from her mundane, work-weary, body-scourged life, right back to the beginning when Davie Armstrong had filled her sky from one end of the moors to the other. Yet there was no ecstatic feeling swamping her, she was numb, twenty years numb. The thawing would take time. Life was funny, crazy (Feathers, 285).

Putting aside a romance novel, there is no need for the reader to speculate about the future of its characters, there is nothing else for her to know, to discover. Unfortunate or not, the characters of a romance die upon the final word. In contrast, the end of a Cookson novel is just that, the end of a story, the characters live on.

I have yet to deal with the second important aspect of the formula, that is, the primacy of romance. While one must admit that love and relationships do play a role in the work of Catherine Cookson, these novels do not belong to the romance genre. Unlike other paraliterary genres, where one

murder constitutes a murder-mystery and one alien categorizes a work as science-fiction, a love interest does not constitute a romance novel. According to the definition set forth in Chapter Two, romance must be the *primary element within the text* and I would suggest that this necessary emphasis is lacking in Cookson.

According to Simone de Beauvoir, Woman "is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her, she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential."[19] This statement holds true for the Harlequin romance, where "the heroine is not involved in any overt adventure beyond trying to respond appropriately to male energy without losing her virginity."[20] In contrast, the role of the Independent Woman is not limited to that of lover. For example, the adventures of Agnes Thorman of The Moth, are not limited to romance but include murder, burning houses, a madman and the dangers of war. Her role is extended from passive bride to active individual, involved in her sole responsibility of running the house, paying the bills, looking after the Human Obstacle Millie, concealing the suspicious death of her father, and learning to assert and understand her needs and wants. It is this process of growing self-awareness which,

[19] Simone de Beauvoir, The Second Sex (London: Johnathan Cape, 1953), p. 16.

[20] Ann Barr Snitow, "Mass Market Romance: Pornography for Women is Different," Radical History Review, 20 (1979), 144.

in Cookson, will always supplant romance, for this is the only base upon which a mature love may flourish.

A brief glance of the amount of textual space devoted to the hero yields very interesting results.

Title	# of Pages Present	Total # of Pages
1. Katie Mulholland (1968)	157	496
2. The Invitation (1970)	77	251
3. Feathers in the Fire (1971)	207	285[21]
4. The Slow Awakening (1976)	80	316
5. The Parson's Daughter (1988)	148	512

The figures speak for themselves, it is difficult to imagine a romance novel in which the hero is absent for more than fifty per cent of the text.

To continue along a pragmatic line of argument, Cookson's works extend far beyond the boundaries of courtship, often spanning infancy, maturity, and death. Unlike the characters of a romance novel, Cookson's characters are endowed with a full lifespan and love is only one of many experiences. In addition, love, in Cookson, falls short of the omnipotent status it enjoys in the romance novel. It is not unusual for the Independent Woman to marry, realize that she made a mistake and, later, remarry not just once, but often twice. Furthermore, the

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21 Although the hero is physically present for a significant portion of this text, he rarely assumes the role of a love interest.

reader's attention is always divided between several love affairs. But, most important of all, as in real life, love offers no guarantee of happiness nor even protection against loneliness.

In conclusion, it seems possible to interpret each of the existing differences (the negligible presence of the hero, meaningful conflict, the reduction of love to one of many experiences, etc.), in terms of a difference in intent. All the elements of the Cookson plot are designed, not to develop romance, but to develop character. In the words of her editor:

> The author describes her novels as 'readable social history interwoven into the lives of people,' but that disguises her art. It is precisely *how* history is woven into the lives of people that sits apart talented writers in the genre from the rest of the field. Many historical novels are full of history and empty of character; some others are peopled by characters who would be more at home in the twentieth century. Catherine does not write historical plots to order...Her talent is as creator, as lifegiver to real characters who are made to exist in our imagination.[22]

Thus, it seems clear that Catherine Cookson does not write romance novels. Indeed, it would be difficult to attach any single label to her work. They are stories of the characters and life of the Tyne.

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22 Catherine Cookson, Catherine Cookson County: Her Pictorial Memoir (London: Corgi Books, 1987), p. 191.

The Angélique Series: A Second Example

Once again, I am faced with the difficult task of proving that the Angélique series, written by Sergeanne Golon, belongs to the romance genre. In this case, the task is farther complicated by a language barrier as the vast majority of romance bibliographies limit themselves to the English language.[1] Rosemary Guiley, in Love Lines: The Romance Reader's Guide to Printed Pleasures, claims that "the most famous historical romance heroine of all time certainly most be Angélique, a seventeenth century French beauty whose nine books sold more than eighty million copies."[2] Guiley further elaborates:

> Her adventures have been so often mimicked that they now seem like stock fare. She sails to Africa, is kidnapped by ruthless pirates and sold as a slave. Escaping, she is captured again and sold to a sultan for his harem. She escapes that too, and returns to France, only to leave again for the New World with yet a new lover, of course, and feeling that anything is possible. With Angélique, anything is.[3]

Kristen Ramsdell, in Happily Ever After: A Guide to Reading Interests in Romance Fiction, includes nine titles of the series within her historical romance category, describing

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[1] Book and film reviews, another potential source of information, are surprisingly superficial and fail to provide futher insight into this matter.

[2] Rosemary Guiley, Love Lines: A Romance Reader's Guide to Printed Pleasures (New York: Facts on File Publications, 1983), p. 98.

[3] Ibid., p. 99.

them in the following terms: "The continuing stories of beautiful, golden haired, green-eyed Angélique who blazes a trail through the seventeenth century from France to the New World in an amazing series of adventures."[4] Although it will be discussed in greater detail below, it is interesting to note that both Guiley and Ramsdell emphasize the adventure element in these stories, thus providing the reader with a valuable insight into their true nature.

Although it cannot be considered evidence, it is interesting to consider the obvious attempt to market the Angélique series as romance material. Each of the nine covers depict the heroine of the story, complete with cascading blonde hair and heaving, exposed breasts. The exaggerated, flowery style of artwork is recognizable to all. The romance buyer's initial impressions are confirmed by such cover synopses as "The Countess Angélique. The dazzling mistress of rogues and royalty finds a wealth of sensuous opportunities in the virgin wilderness of the New World."[5] Although in actuality Angélique's romantic involvements, in this novel, are limited both in number and to a single individual, the reader is deceived into purchasing and subsequently reading the novel in terms of

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[4] Kristin Ramsdell, Happily Ever After: A Guide to Reading Interests in Romance Fiction. (Littleton: Libraries Unlimited, 1987) 128.

[5] Taken from the cover of The Countess Angélique (1968). The original covers of the French language editions are not available.

certain romantic expectations.

As the Angélique novels are classified as historical romances, I feel it necessary to take a closer look at the definition of this genre. According to Kristen Ramsdell, the historical romance is simply a love story with an historical setting. She further divides this category into two distinct types: "those in which actual historical events and characters are essential to the plot--Romantic Historicals--and those in which they are merely romantic background to the love story--Period Romances."[6] While the argument outlined below does not depend on this distinction per se, it does rely on its broader implications, that is, the question of primacy or emphasis. In Period Romances, the importance of historical detail is limited to its function as setting or background. In other words, it is just another element within the text, like character and formula, which is manipulated by its author to create romance. In the Romantic Historicals, conversely, the depiction of love and romance is subordinated to the accurate portrayal of historical personages and events. Once again, I want to emphasize that a coherent, working definition of the romance genre must insist upon the primacy of romance above any other element within the text. Therefore, neither the Romantic Historicals, nor any other

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[6] Kristen Ramsdell. Happily Ever After: A Guide to Reading Interests in Romance Fiction. (Littleton: Libraries Unlimited, 1987) 89.

story where elements such as history, adventure, or mystery exist to the point of interfering with the romantic content of the text, belong to the romance genre. A detailed analysis of the Angélique character and the plot formation of these texts reveals that the level of primacy necessary for inclusion into the romance genre is distinctly lacking.

A Study of the Angélique Character

The romantic quartet of characters does not exist within the Angélique Series. These narratives, as the appearance of her name in each of the various titles suggests, focus on one central character, Angélique herself. No other character plays anything more than a secondary role, functioning only through his or her relationship to Angélique, as ally or enemy.

The key word in reference to the traditional romance heroine is ordinary. By definition, she is petite and delicate, quiet and unassuming. Indeed, all aspects of her person will tend towards the understated rather than the extreme. As a strong reader-character relationship is an essential element of the romance experience, the heroine must be seen as someone very much like the reader herself, someone to whom she is able to relate. In contrast, Angélique is a character of extremes and, more importantly, a character who violates the romance norms. For instance, she is not merely attractive but is strikingly beautiful. Nor does she fall into the anonymity of the middle class but lives either as a beggar in the Paris underworld or as the

wealthiest woman in the New World. In short, every aspect of Angélique suggests the extraordinary.

Strangely enough, Angélique's physical appearance is never fully delineated. One is left to infer her beauty from the unanimous reactions of those around her. While the reader engaged with the text does not notice this absence of detail, a retrospective consideration suggests an aura of mystery and the unknown. It is as if Angélique's beauty is enhanced by the very vagueness of its description. This ethereal, otherworldly quality is recognized by the characters themselves, who describe her in the following terms:

> Un être qui sait tout, qui connaît tout, qui a tous les pouvoirs, un corps paré de toutes les séductions. Sorcière, déesse, fée. Oui, en effet, c'était la Femme. Ou peut-être la Démone!...[7]

The brief sketches which do appear confirm that Angélique's beauty is unaffected and natural, in both senses of the word.

> Dès l'aube, la petite s'enfuyait, cheveux au vent, à peine plus vêtue qu'une paysanne d'une chemise, d'un corselet et d'une jupe déteinte, et ses petits pieds aussi fins que ceux d'une princesse étaient durs comme de la corne, car elle expédiait sans façon ses chaussures dans le premier buisson venu, afin de trotter plus légèrement. Si on la rappelait, elle

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[7] Sergeanne Golon, Angélique et le Nouveau Monde (Paris: Editions De Trevise, 1967), p. 283. All subsequent references to this text will be indicated in parentheses

> tournait à peine son visage rond et doré par le soleil où brillaient deux yeux d'un bleu vert, de la couleur de cette plante qui pousse dans les marais et qui porte son nom.[8]

When one recalls the Harlequin division of masculine and feminine space, as outlined in Chapter Two, it is interesting to note that the Angélique character is associated with nature and the outdoors throughout this series. This represents only the first of many qualities which remind the reader not of the traditional romance heroine, but, surprisingly enough, the hero figure. Furthermore, unlike the romance heroine, who is both defined by and dependent upon her physical appearance, Angélique's beauty is portrayed as incidental and unimportant. She is, above all else, an adventuress, a woman who sacrifices elegance for utility and ease of action.

> A son habitude, Angélique ceignit la ceinture de cuir qui supportait à droite un étui et son pistolet, à gauche deux forreaux, l'un à poignard, l'autre à couteau. A cette ceinture aussi on ne cessait d'ajouter diver petits objets indispensables, ficelle, gants, moutles, bourses...Par-dessus ses souliers elle enfilait dans la maison des guêtres de peau chamoisée, façonnée et cousue a l'indigène et qui gardait la chaleur. Quand elle sortait elle avait des jambières de peau s'arrêtant sous les genoux et de grosses bottes (Angélique et le Nouveau Monde, 336).

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within the text of the thesis.

[8] Sergeanne Golon, Marquise Des Anges (Paris: Editions De Trevise, 1967), pp. 13-14. All subsequent references to this text will be indicated in parentheses within the text of the thesis.

The romance heroine is, by definition, both weak and passive; she is transformed only through her relationship to the hero, a relationship which she may not pursue but must only await. Angélique, conversely, possesses a strength and presence reminiscent of Robin Hood, Davie Crockett and other such folk heroes. Among her many adventures, a few stand forth as unparalleled feats of strength and bravery: for example, when Angélique, a penniless widow, escapes the Kingdom of France where she has been charged with treason and sentenced to death; or, when she leads an army of Protestant peasants against the King's soldiers as the Rebel of Poitou; and finally, in the New World, when she earns the respect of Outakke "chef des Mohawks," first by besting him in combat and later by saving his life. A single example will suffice to illustrate the striking difference which exists between Angélique and the typical romance heroine.

> Elle l'aperçut, ombre noire, dressée sur le soleil couchant, avec son tomahawk levé et la touffe de ses cheveux tranformée en aigrette brillante et ressemblant à un grand oiseau de proie, silencieux et immense, qui s'abattait sur elle. Elle se déroba d'un coup de reins. Il trébucha, manqua son but et, comme elle le saisissait d'une main vive à la cheville, il tomba lourdement dans les feuillages au bord du ruisseau. Son casse-tête lui échappa et presque aussitôt, la pointe aiguë du poignard s'appuya sur sa gorge...L'Iroquois ne pouvait comprendre comment un guerrier aussi fort, aussi habile, aussi invulnérable que lui, se trouvait à la merci d'une femme, et encore d'une femme blanche (Angélique et le Nouveau Monde, 135-36)!

It is important to note that this type of episode, while typical of the Angélique narratives, is incongruous within the typical romance framework: it clearly belongs to the adventure genre.

While a romance heroine may occasionally exhibit a fiery disposition, she rarely, if ever, oversteps the boundaries of proper feminine behavior. Not only does Angélique's character exhibit extraordinary strength and bravery, there is, in addition, an undeniable element of aggression and violence.

> Angélique serrait les dents. Elle avait oublié où elle se trouvait. Il lui semblait qu'elle était à nouveau aux aguets, au coeur de la forêt poitevine et, sous le canon de son arme, les soldats du Roi s'abattaient. Derrière ses dents serrées, montait le cri ancien de son coeur, qui si souvant avait jailli de ses lèvres: "Tue! Tue!..." (Angélique et le Nouveau Monde, 53).

It is both significant and revealing that no other character in the series approaches Angélique's stature in either deed or vividness of description. She is the unchallenged figure of power and authority, it is to her that both men and women look, for protection and advice. This heroine has no need for male guardianship, indeed, it is she who saves the life of her husband time and time again. Her extraordinary beauty, strength and bravery combine to create a character larger-than-life; not a heroine (the title earned more often than not through one's

relationship to the hero) but a female hero, of the same legendary stature as Joan of Arc.

> Ce ne fut que peu à peu qu'on apprit le rôle joué par une femme dans cette grande flambée de haine et comment elle avait réussi à grouper vers un seul but les protestants et les catholiques, les nobles et les paysans et les bourgeois des petites villes. La légende de cette femme, cela faisait sourire certains à la cour. D'autres y croyaient! Le temps des belles frondeuses n'était pas loin et nul en France n'oublie facilement qu'il y eut jadis, issue de son terroir, une femme Jehane qui menait les reîtres au combat. Celle-ci n'était pas une paysanne car la noblesse l'écoutait. Peu à peu, les hobereaux obscurs, aux noms prestigieux dont on faisait gorges chaudes à Verasilles, parce qu'ils étaient plus pauvres que des gueux, rassemblèrent leurs gens et les armèrent par on ne sait quel miracle.[9]

While the history of literature does include a few female adventuresses, most notably Madamoiselle de Maupin (Gautier, 1835) and Marquis de Sade's Justine (1791), it is significant that, within the modern realm of popular literature, we must turn towards the male-oriented genres to find Angélique's equal in such figures as James Bond and Mike Hammer.[10]

The romance heroine is created not as an identifiable individual, but, rather, as a medium or tool through which

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[9] Sergeanne Golon, Angélique se révolte (Paris: Editions De Trevise, 1961), p. 116.

[10] The comic book character of Modesty Blaise represents one possible exception to this statement.

the reader is able to experience love and nurturance. The character is essentially invisible, intentionally lost within her function. The reader will remember that, in the romance novel, love is always more important than the lovers. Angélique, however, is created at such proportions that it is impossible for the reader to lose her specific identity. As the plot summaries will demonstrate, she is the single most important element within the text, the source of all meaning. In the romance novel, the illusion of plausibility is of the utmost importance and is maintained, in part, by creating a heroine who the reader feels resembles her. In the Angélique novels, it is the obvious differences which attract the reader, Angélique is like no one else, she certainly bears no resemblance to her readers. It is the grandiose and unbelievable nature of her feats which entertains us. These novels, therefore, represent a very different reading experience than that of the romance novel. It is my opinion that the Angélique reading experience is comprised of adventure, challenge and victory. The ensuing discussion of Golon's plot formation supports this thesis.

Plot Formation

At this stage in my argument, I would like to remind the reader that the two most important aspects of the romance formula are its adherence to a set pattern of events and the unchallenged primacy of romance. A brief summary of

three Angélique stories reveals, above and beyond a deviation from the romance formula, both an absence of romance and a prominent element of adventure.

1. Marquise des Anges

Marquise des Anges, the first title in the Angélique Series, traces Angélique's life from childhood through to adulthood. As an aggressive, confident child, Angélique overhears a plot to poison the King of France and blackmails the would-be murderer into granting a favour to her father, a poverty-stricken nobleman. Several years later, Angélique's father virtually "sells" her to the mysterious Count Joffrey De Peyrac as part of a business transaction. Although Angélique is initially horrified by the scared appearance and limping gait of her strange husband, she gradually comes to love him. Her marriage, however, is short-lived as Joffrey, one of the last victims of the Inquisition, is arrested for sorcery and sentenced to burn at the stake. Angélique, pregnant and penniless, swears to seek revenge against all those involved in the wrongful arrest of her husband. Fleeing from the King's soldiers, who have orders to kill her, Angélique joins the Paris underworld as mistress to Calembredaine, master of the thieves. It is in this environment that Angélique learns the skills of an adventuress: how to handle a dagger, shoot, steal and concoct herbal medicines. Finally, tired of living as a fugitive, Angélique blackmails her cousin, Marquis Phillipe du Plessis-Bellière, whose family was

involved in the royal murder plot, to marry her and reintroduce her to society. Although the final pages see Angélique restored to her former splendor, the novel concludes upon a hint of what adventures are still to come.

2. Angélique se Révolte (1963)

Angélique se Révolte is set at the height of the Huguenot uprisings in France. When the story opens, Angélique has just returned to France, having escaped from the harem of Sultan Mulai Ismail, only to be captured by the King's men. She is taken, under guard, to her chateau in Poitou to reflect upon her crimes and prepare for a public apology to Louis XIV. Molines, the wise steward of her estates, begs Angélique to restore herself to the King's favour not only for her sake, but so that she may intercede on behalf of the people of Poitou who are suffering under the presence of the King's dragoons. Yet, on the very night that Angélique agrees to this proposal, the dragoons storm her chateau, kill her servants, slit the throat of her youngest son and brutally rape Angélique herself. The ravages of this night leave Angélique pregnant and unable to bear the physical advances of any man. Bent on revenge, Angélique unites the Protestants and the Catholics in battle against the King. After months of bloody assaults, the tide of favour turns against Angélique and she is forced to flee. While attempting to do so, she is caught in a peasant attack, arrested and branded with the fleur-des-lis, the mark of criminals. The judge orders her to improve her

spiritual condition by working as a servant in the house of Maître Gabriel Berne. Angélique comes to care about this Protestant family and helps to plan their escape. When these plans are discovered, she is arrested and sentenced to death. Fortunately, her old friend Desgrez intervenes, sets Angélique free and promises her friends twenty-four hours to escape. In a fit of desperation, Angélique approaches the captain of the nearest ship and asks for the passage of her friends to the West Indies. The captain agrees but is subsequently revealed as none other than the pirate Rescator who had once paid 35,000 piastres for Angélique as a slave girl. As the novel concludes, Angélique and her friends are on board the Rescator's ship, a man who both frightens and intrigues Angélique, heading for a new series of adventures in America.

3. Angélique et le Nouveau Monde

Angélique et le Nouveau Monde is the story of our heroine's first year in the New World, after she has been reunited with her husband and their two sons.

Set during the years of Frontenac's regime, it is a time of great unrest and animosity between the English and the French and the Indians and the settlers. Furthermore, Angélique's arrival is mistaken for that of "la Demone de l'Acadia" as prophesied by the Church, causing all factions to fear and distrust her. Within the first week, Angélique endures the brutal trek to Joffrey's outpost, throws a giant tortoise over a cliff after it threatens the safety of her

horse and child, defends herself from the numerous attacks waged by the natives, and negotiates for the life of a young child captured by the Iroquois.

In an attempt to achieve peace, Joffrey signs a treaty with the chiefs of the Five Nations but his efforts are shattered when Jesuit traitors slaughter four of the five ambassadors. In order to avoid war, Joffrey burns the entire outpost and all their supplies, as a gift of retribution to the affected tribes. The party is forced to retreat to a smaller fort only a few weeks before the onset of winter. The greater part of this narrative then details how Angélique deals with the hardships of her first winter in the New World: the harsh conditions, a food shortage, a measles epidemic and the constant accusations of sorcery levied against her by the Jesuits. The novel concludes with the approach of Spring, the protagonists have survived the winter, but Angélique realizes that her biggest battle, that with the powerful Jesuit leader, Father Orgeval, still lies ahead.

Comments

While the above summaries are not capable of revealing the intricacies of plot which characterize the Angélique novels, they do demonstrate the original, as opposed to formulaic, nature of these works and, in general, a marked absence of romantic content. A brief study of the actual amount of textual space devoted to the hero confirms this.

Title	# of Pages Present	Total # of Pages
Marquise des Anges	117	790
Angélique se Révolte	60	384
Angélique et le Nouveau Monde	96	563
La Tentation d'Angélique	92	424
Angélique et le Complot des Ombres	37	332

As this chart indicates, the hero represents a negligible presence within the text. In fact, Golon actually uses the textual events to justify this lack of romance. For example, in Marquise des Anges, the reader is told that Angélique has no interest in pursuing a relationship as she is still in mourning for her husband, while the physical abuses she suffers early in Angélique se Révolte leave her unable to bear the touch of any man. The strange circumstances and cramped quarters provide a perfect excuse in Angélique et le Nouveau Monde,

> Elle avait été toujours une errante de l'amour. Et même en ces derniers temps, depuis le jour encore récent, trois mois à peine, où, sur le "Gouldsboro," il l'avait reconquise, leur existence mouvementée et voyageuse ne leur avait guère permis d'être autre chose que des amants de passage, sous des toits de fortune. (Angélique et le Nouveau Monde, 236).

Furthermore, Angélique's husband, Count Joffrey De Peyrac, is an atypical lover. The following passage represents Angélique's first impression of this man:

> Une grande silhouette degingandée et brimbalante apparut vêtue de velours pourpre et s'appuyant sur une canne d'ébène...A mesure que ce personnage progressait en boitant on distinguait, dans l'encadrement d'une ample perruque noire, un visage aussi déplaisant à regarder que l'esemble de sa démarche. Deux profondes cicatrices barraient sa tempe et sa joue gauche, et fermaient à demi la paupière. Les lèvres étaient fortes, entièrement rasées, ce qui n'était pas la mode et ajoutait à l'aspect insolite de ce curieus épouvantail (Marquise Des Anges, 147).

Finally, if one studies the nature of the romance depicted, it is clear that it is purely physical. Sex, in the Harlequin romance, transcends the physical to be interpreted by both the readers and the participants as a physical manifestation of love. In Angélique, sex is nothing more than a passionate, enjoyable physical encounter. The following description is typical,

> Cette nuit-là, dans les bras de Joffrey De Peyrac, elle goûta l'amour avec un sentiment de gaieté et de légèreté qu'il lui semblait ne pas avoir éprouvé depuis sa jeunesse. Peyrac devinait a l'éclat du sourire d'Angélique qu'elle était libérée des tensions qui trop longtemps avaient contraint la spontanéité de ses élans. Leur joie était neuve (Angélique et le Nouveau Monde, 469).

Perhaps sufficient time has been spent demonstrating how these novels differ from the typical romance text and the reader would better profit from an examination of the Angélique texts as novels of adventure and intrigue.

Plot, in the adventure genre, is constructed to provide

quick and repeated gratification of a reader's need for excitement. Angélique's cyclic episodic structure reflects this. An initial period of relative calm is interrupted by some unforeseen event, usually the arrival of a stranger or an act of treachery. This initiates a period of conflict which culminates in a crisis and is followed by a denouement. The cycle is completed with the return of peace but there always remains the threat of further danger, thus guaranteeing the continuation of the cycle. While each book may revolve around one central conflict, it is inevitably interspersed with many minor confrontations.

Unlike the romance novel, where every step of the formula is a foregone conclusion, suspense plays a significant role within the adventure plot. Indeed, many of the best known suspense techniques appear within the Angélique novels. First and foremost, there is the most common technique of foreshadowing. The ending of Chapter Two, Part Two of Angélique et le Nouveau Monde is a typical example of how this technique functions within the text, "Un sentiment de catastrophe s'empara d'eux tous. Angélique avait disparu" (Angélique et le Nouveau Monde, 131). Yet, it is not uncommon for such foreshadowing to appear at the very end of a text, piquing the reader's curiosity about the next title, thereby ensuring that the novels function as a series. For example, La Tentation d'Angélique concludes upon the arrival of a stranger, a woman who evokes the following reaction from Angélique:

> L'esprit pétrifié et saisie d'une frayeur indicible, elle songea: "Est-ce donc elle? Celle qui doit s'élever des eaux? Celle qui doit venir parmi nous pour le service de Lucifer?"[11]

Moreover, the novels are filled with prophetic symbols, visions and dreams. For example, the Church's vision of "la Demone de l'Acadia" and Angélique's coinciding appearance dominate the storylines of three titles! This brings us to what is perhaps the most intriguing device to be found in these works, the motif of hidden or mistaken identity. Throughout these narratives, a plethora of characters appear in disguise. For example, the Mediterranean pirate Rescator who purchases Angélique from a slave market, only to have her escape, is revealed two titles later to be Angélique's long lost husband, Count Joffrey De Peyrac! The timing of these stranger's arrival and subsequent unmasking, combined with the reader's suspicions of their true identity are a crucial device in the creation of suspense within the Angélique series.

The adventure story inevitably takes place in a tension-charged environment. In the true romance novel, history is used to create a charming, nostalgic atmosphere where the heroine wears sumptuous gowns and performs an elaborate toilette. In contrast, the historical setting of the Angélique novels is used to create a rugged, untamed atmosphere of danger and adventure. This is made perfectly

11 Sergeanne Golon, La Tentation d'Angélique, Part Two (Paris: Editions De Trevise, 1969), p. 384.

clear by Angélique herself:

> Elle en ressentait un désagréable frisson tout au long de l'échine. Elle saisit Honorine dans ses bras et la serra éperdument contre elle. Le danger de mort violente était partout. Il infestait l'air même qu'on respirait. Elle en avait le goût sur la langue. Comment s'expliquer? C'était cela, l'Amérique. La mort violente était partout, mais on avait le droit de vivre et de se défendre (Angélique et le Nouveau Monde, 69).

In conclusion, it appears obvious that the novels in the Angélique Series do not belong to the romance genre, indeed, romance constitutes only a negligible element in these texts. How then, are we to describe them? Based on my interpretation of the texts, I would suggest that the novels of Sergeanne Golon are best interpreted as chronicles of adventure, centering around the indomitable, legendary character of the Countess Angélique De Peyrac.

Conclusion

Perhaps, at this junction, a summary of the preceding chapters would be prudent. The logic of my argument may be outlined as follows: the reading process of the romance novel differs from that of main stream literature and, to a certain extent, even from that of other paraliterary genres. This difference is most aptly captured in the opposition of directed versus tentative reading. The mainstream reader is meant to read tentatively in search of meaning: interpreting, re-evaluating and speculating according to an ever changing hypothesis. In contrast, the romance reader's knowledge of the romance formula and conventions, coupled with the highly specialized needs implied by her choice of material, allow for only one possible interpretation of a text. Furthermore, as the preceding three chapters reveal, the romance's process of naturalization is both so highly structured and so strongly internalized that a reader will actually misinterpret a text, forcing it to conform to her expectations. The novels of Catherine Cookson and Sergeanne Golon serve as excellent illustrations of how texts may be misread. Although these works possess almost none of the characteristics of the traditional romance novel, as defined in Chapter Two, they are read as romance texts.

Yet, in a discipline characterized by a myriad of theories, schools and approaches, the scholar is forced to recognize that the true value of any approach lies in its practical application. Does it stand up to the rigours of a

practical application and, more importantly, does it have the potential to bring new insight to a work of literature or theory? Before concluding, I feel it necessary to undertake a pragmatic exploration of the theory proposed within these pages. To this end, I will attempt a re-evaluation of the comparable material in Janice Radway's Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature.

Radway's study of romance readers and their reading habits suggests not one but two inter-related questions to be addressed: primarily, her concept of the romantic reading process and secondly, her distinction between "ideal" and "failed" romances. The problem with Radway's interpretation of the romantic reading process stems from her belief that the modern romance is both a myth ("they all *retell* a single tale whose final outcome their readers always already know") and a realistic novel ("stories about unknown and distinct characters whose fates are not yet determined").[1] Apparently, Radway is fooled by the illusion of mimesis which is created by an abundance of detail in the romance's traditional treatment of setting and filler (descriptions of clothes, toilette, and furniture) to such an extent that she feels justified in defining the romance

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[1] Janice Radway, Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), p. 198. All subsequent references to this text will be indicated in parentheses within the text of the thesis.

as a realistic text. Furthermore, despite its mythic elements, she concludes that the romance is read as a novel, that is, tentatively.

> Like most narratives, the romance proceeds by setting up an initial situation whose very instability raises multiple possibilities of future resolution. The reader is invited to project these possible endings through suggestions made by a narrator or by the heroine herself. These potential endings are then kept consistently before the reader by the seemingly endless repetition of threats to the heroine's virginity or life (Radway, 205).

Radway's theory implies that the knowledge of the reader is limited to that of the character(s). Therefore, stage ten of Radway's thirteen part model of the romance formula (when the heroine reinterprets the hero's ambiguous behavior as the product of previous hurt) represents as much of a revelation to the romance reader as to the heroine.[2] Until that moment, Radway continues, the reader interprets

[2] Radway's thirteen part formula is as follows: 1) The heroine's social identity is destroyed. 2) The heroine reacts antagonistically to an aristocratic male. 3) The aristocratic male responds ambiguously to the heroine. 4) The heroine interprets the hero's behavior as evidence of a purely sexual interest in her. 5) The heroine responds to the hero's behavior with anger or coldness. 6) The hero retaliates by punishing the heroine. 7) The heroine and hero are physically and/or emotionally separated. 8) The hero treats the heroine tenderly. 9) The heroine responds warmly to the hero's act of tenderness. 10) The heroine reinterprets the hero's ambiguous behavior as the product of previous hurt. 11) The hero proposes/openly declares his love for/demonstrates his unwavering commitment to the heroine with a supreme act of tenderness. 12) The heroine responds sexually and emotionally. 13) The heroine's identity is restored.

the hero's actions at face value, as expressions of antagonism and violence. Based on this assumption, Radway proposes a complex reading experience which provokes first, feelings of anger (steps 1-9) and, only subsequently, those of love and nurturance (steps 10-13).

> In view of its narrative organization, that before the ideal romance induces pleasure in the reader by providing her with vicarious nurturance and by reassuring her that standard female development does indeed lead to emotional rewards, it may first evoke equally powerful feelings of anger and fear directed at the fictional hero and thus more generally at men (Radway, 157).

There are several obvious flaws and contradictions within Radway's argument. The most significant of these is her failure to recognize the role which the reader's knowledge of the romance conventions assumes in the reading process. The reason why readers choose to read romance novels is because they are sure each one will provide a certain kind of experience, a temporary escape from reality. Their superior knowledge of the hero's motivation and the inevitability of the happy ending constitutes a significant part of that experience. Although the importance of formula adherence has been demonstrated in previous chapters, Radway herself supplies a valuable piece of evidence in support of this fact. Reading the Romance reveals that sixty percent of the reader survey group actually read the conclusion before engaging in the rest of the novel to ensure that it

will conform to their expectations. Furthermore, romance readers often re-read their favorite selections not just once, but many times. All of this supports my thesis that, in reality, it is the mythic elements of a romance which attract its readers and, more importantly, it is their knowledge of the romance myth which governs their reading of these texts.

Having called the reinterpretive nature of Radway's concept of the romantic reading process into question, the second element of her argument, that dealing with the dual nature of the reading experience, collapses. The reader's knowledge of the romance formula and conventions ensures that the hero's actions are never misunderstood but are simultaneously interpreted as expressions, however misguided, of love. Although the heroine understandably resents the hero's behavior and only gradually learns to forgive him, the reader does not participate in this same process: she never has to forgive the hero *because she never blamed him.*

Moreover, negative emotions such as anger and resentment have no place in the romantic reading experience. This process represents, to its readers, a temporary escape from the problems of real life and real life relationships. Radway herself claims,

> The romance functions always as a utopian wish fulfillment fantasy through which women try to imagine themselves as they often are not in day-to-day existence,

> that is, as happy and content (Radway, 151).

The various comments of her survey participants confirm this. In the words of one reader,

> "We want something that's light because we're trying to get away from our problems. And that's why we read books. And we don't like to read books and have those kinds of problems because then we're not escaping" (Radway, 159).

Any connection between the world created in the romance and the real world is frowned upon. In contrast to Radway, I would suggest that the reading experience of the romance novel should not be interpreted as an opportunity for readers to express resentment against the abusive treatment they may receive in their own relationships, but, rather, as a means to negate the very existence of such treatment, thereby rendering the process a purely positive and enjoyable experience. Incidentally, it is interesting to note that the reader quoted above uses the general term "book" when she actually means to designate " romance." This suggests the type of attitude which allows for the misreading of texts. Her conception of literature is clearly limited to her conception of the romance novel which, in turn, suggests that she will approach all texts with the same expectations.

We may now turn to the second question raised by Radway's theory, her distinction between the "ideal" and the "failed" romance. My purpose here is not to question the

observations which she draws, but rather, to demonstrate that those novels which she designates as "failed" do not belong to the romance genre and actually represent misread texts.

Chapter Four of Reading the Romance is devoted to a body of texts which Radway's survey group has identified as being among their favorites. The characteristics common to all of these texts include: a resolute focus on a single, developing relationship between heroine and hero; an intense identification between reader and heroine; a young nurturing heroine who possesses extraordinary beauty, childlike innocence and inexperience; a very handsome and powerful hero who, although capable of emotional blackmail, also reveals a hint of kindness; and, finally, a formula which traces the heroine's transformation from "an isolated, asexual, insecure adolescent who is unsure of her own identity, into a mature, sensual, and very married woman who has realized her full potential and identity as partner of a man" (Radway, 134). The careful reader cannot help but recognize that Radway's definition of the "ideal" romance corresponds directly to the general definition of the romance genre as outlined in Chapter Two of this work. I feel that the characteristics outlined above do not constitute an ideal, or in any way extraordinary, example of a romance text, but, rather, represent the *minimum requirements* necessary for a novel to qualify as a romance.

Radway then proceeds to describe the counterpart of the

"ideal" romance, that is, the "failed" romance; texts which her survey readers felt to be lacking in one respect or another. It is interesting, for our purposes, to explore the reasons why these texts are perceived as failures as it reveals that those texts which Radway considers to be "failed" romances do not, in reality, belong to the romance genre at all.

According to Radway, the four problems common to all of the "failed" texts are: they do not focus on a single developing relationship between a man and a woman; the hero and heroine are difficult to identify and their role is often divided between more than one character; the novels describe a variety of relationships other than that of the hero and heroine; and, finally, they are too realistic and often deal with serious issues and real-life problems.[3] Radway concludes that "failure is somehow wrapped up with the inability to provide the reader with the right kind of vicarious emotion" (Radway, 178). It seems clear that the type of text described above fails only in the sense that it does not meet the minimum requirements of a romance novel and, therefore, should not be considered as a failed romance, but rather, should not be considered a romance at all.

Two brief summaries suffice to demonstrate my point.

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[3] Once again, it is interesting to note that this description of the "failed" romance corresponds directly to that of the Catherine Cookson novels, as put forth in Chapter Three.

Rosemary Roger's The Insiders is qualified by the Smithton women as one of the worst of the "failed" romances. Although the text concludes with a happy ending, uniting hero and heroine, the body of the novel is devoted to the graphic depiction of numerous sexual encounters. The following description, given by Radway, renders it painfully obvious that the text in question does not belong to the romance genre but, in actuality, is pornography.

> Rogers (is not) content with the depiction of simple heterosexual intercourse. She includes scenes between lesbian lovers, describes her heroine, Eve, masturbating with a vibrator before a mirror, discusses anal intercourse in several scenes, describes the hero's brutal treatment of a fifteen-year-old girl, and finally details at great length the gang rape of her heroine in which the hero participates (Radway, 165).

There is no love, no tenderness, nothing to constitute the pleasurable romance experience. Indeed, it is difficult to understand, especially when her readers identify it as pornography, how Radway manages to confuse this with romance.

My second example is Victoria Kelrich's High Fashion. This novel alternately follows the stories of Sugar Dawson and Elizabeth Vail, two women trying to succeed in the highly competitive world of fashion design. While Sugar gives up her career for a marriage which quickly dissolves, Elizabeth grows increasingly independent. "Although love and sex are important to Elizabeth, they are no longer the

goals of her existence. She enjoys her work and intends to set about building a career for herself" (Radway, 182). While the attitude implied in this description is clearly out of place in a romance novel, it is the ending which convinces me to look for an alternative means to classify this text. The final passage is worth quoting in its entirety.

> She wondered how long it would last. Peter spoke in terms of a lifetime, of the year cut into segments of duty and work and pleasure. *I love him,* she thought. *That will last, even if our lives pull us apart. No,* she amended, forcing herself to be honest, knowing that only the truth would enable her to live each moment as fully as she could. *It will last as long as it lasts. If it's for a lifetime, wonderful.If it's for a while, that's wonderful too. There are no guarantees. There's only the trying.* Elisabeth pulled out a sketch pad and wrote "Components" at the top of the page. She looked at the name, wondering if she was about to diagram her life or a new dress line. Then, nodding to herself, kicking off her shoes, she got down to work (Radway, 182-83).

Although it is clear to the objective reader that Elizabeth *will not live happily ever after,* thereby disqualifying the text as a romance, it is misread by both Radway and her readers. Of this novel, one of the readers remarks, "Ending was left too much in the air" (Radway, 183). It appears that this woman is capable of interpreting narrative events only in terms of the romance formula she has internalized. She would rather misread a text than

admit to the possibility of an alternative meaning. Radway herself, describes the text as a feminist romance, not realizing that this represents an impossible combination (Radway, 182). If there is a need to classify High Fashion into a particular category or genre, I would suggest that it represents an example of a "glitz" novel: a book which allows the reader to experience, through the heroine, feelings of power and authority, the very qualities that the romance heroine is forced to sacrifice for love.

Thus, it appears that Radway's distinction between "ideal" and "failed" romances is based upon a misreading of the texts: the texts she describes as "failed" are not romance novels. Indeed, they fail only because they are evaluated according to an inapplicable set of criteria. Unfortunately, it is outside the scope of this study to offer fully delineated alternative classifications. I want only to emphasize that the modern romance represents something very different from the gothic novel, the "glitz" novel, the love story, the traditional realistic novel, and the pornographic novel. Perhaps, I may now address the underlying reasons for this confusion. As outlined in Chapter Two, the typical romance reader will misread a text because her knowledge of the romance formula and conventions is so highly internalized as to allow for only a single interpretation of a text. The reader's reaction to High Fashion, quoted above, is a perfect example of this. A critical misreading, however, represents a very different

question. I believe that Radway's difficulties stem from her oversimplified definition of the romance novel. According to Radway, "a story will earn the categorical title of romance...if it supplies the requisite ending to a male-female relationship" (Radway, 163). While a happy ending is an important part of the romance novel, it certainly cannot function as the sole criterion for classification. A romance novel must follow a certain set pattern of events, it must describe a certain type of hero and heroine, in a certain type of relationship. Most importantly, the romance novel must provoke a strong reader-character relationship and provide a particular type of escape experience. Finally, all elements must be conscientiously manipulated and subordinated to create romance. This leads to perhaps the most important point I can make, the modern romance, as a genre, represents a complex, multi-faceted phenomenon, a fact which is too often overlooked in paraliterary criticism. In order to achieve a complete understanding and appreciation of popular fiction we must, in the future, aim for a more precise and careful categorization of paraliterary genres.

Thus, I reach the conclusion of my task. I have tried, above all else, to bring forth a logical, viable approach to the study of the modern romance. In doing so, I present paraliterature as a complex, intriguing dimension of the literary realm. My goal is not to challenge the work which has already been accomplished, nor to suggest that my

contribution has lessened the need for future study, but only to offer a positive alternative to the dismissive attitude which characterizes so much paraliterary criticism. I can only hope that I have stirred the imagination of my peers and awakened within them an increased awareness and appreciation of the unique qualities of the modern romance. I approached this project with a sense of curiosity which has grown rather than diminished. At this point in time, there remains a void in the critical theory of literature, future study holds the possibility of rendering it whole.

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